PC ZONE

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON

The action-packed sequel to Rainbow Six and Rogue Spear

REVEALED!

PROJECT IGI 2

The award-winning shooter is back with a vengeance

PLAYTEST

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

Finished! We give you our verdict

EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

ALIENS vs PREDATOR 2

The scariest sequel ever passes the acid test

www.pczone.co.uk

TINY COMPO: What was Tom Clancy's first novel, also released as a game on the C64?
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The most eagerly awaited action game in years is finished and we've played it. Read our first impressions

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PC GAMING FOR THE MASSES www.pczone.co.uk #10 CHRISTMAS 2001

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NEOCRON
Deus Ex meets Blade Runner — finally, an online RPG for action fans

BETA TEST PREVIEW
MOTOR CITY

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RED ALERT 2: YURI'S REVENGE
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FLASHPOINT MAPS & MODS
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WIN THE TOP 10 PC GAMES
SEE THE PC ZONE CHARTS PAGE 18

WE WISH YOU AN EARLY CHRISTMAS...

Despite the fact that I'm sat writing this in a T-shirt at the end of a particularly mild October, I'd like to welcome you to the *ZONE* Christmas Special. That's right. And while we've got an excuse (of sorts), I've actually seen a Christmas tree up and flashing in a house down the road from where I live. Are they mad? While we're all tucking into our roast on December 25 they'll presumably be hunting for chocolate eggs under the stairs.

Thankfully, we're not the only ones who are joining Mr and Mrs Impatient in celebrating Christmas early. Publishers across the world have been hard at work all year, and have unleashed some real blockbusters onto the shelves marked PC. In a mammoth review section this issue we've managed to secure world exclusives of two of the best shooters in *Aliens vs Predator 2* and *Ghost Recon*. The former is an exceptionally pleasant surprise as we've been banging on about it for so long, that when the single-player demo proved to be a bit of a disappointment we were slightly apprehensive. We shouldn't have been – turn to page 64 for the lowdown on the game that's to *AvP* what *Aliens* was to *Alien*. But it's not all about guns. First reviews of *Empire Earth*, *FIFA 2002* and *IL-2* means that whatever floats your boat, you'll find it in this magazine.

> **"Publishers across the world have been hard at work all year, and have released some real blockbusters"**

And there's another huge game that's going to get to see the light of day before Christmas proper. We had to share an aeroplane with friends from our rival publications in order to sneak a few hours' peek at completed code of *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* and you can find out exactly what we thought of it on page 36. As is id's way, review code won't be released to us until the day the boxed copy hits the shelves so you're going to have to wait for our definitive review next issue, but we can exclusively speculate that it's going to be good enough to enter our Top 100 in a pretty lofty position. Until then, have a brilliant early Christmas on us. Now where are my shades...

Dave Woods
Editor

AvP 2:
a Christmas Tail...

- Accessible gameplay built upon the familiar RTS engine adapted from Ensemble's popular Age of Empire® series.

- Use the scenario editor to create custom single or multiplayer battlegrounds with virtually any *Star Wars* units and settings.

- Conflicts involve six key civilisations: Galactic Empire, Rebel Alliance, Wookiees, Gungans, Royal Naboo and Trade Federation.

- Execute your campaign over land, sea and air with over 300 different units and structures in single-player campaigns, skirmishes and multiplayer battles.

- Epic real-time strategy set against a backdrop of the entire *Star Wars* saga.

STAR WARS™
GALACTIC
BATTLEGROUNDS™

Real-time strategy on a galactic scale.
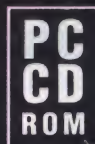
All the dark legions are at his command. And you control his destiny.

The name's Jones, Dave Jones

IGI 2

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Innerloop Studios
PUBLISHER Codemasters
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Spring 2002
WEBSITE www.codemasters.com

IN SUMMARY

Sequel to last year's hit stealth-based FPS, *IGI 2* will feature more behind-the-lines sabotage, with you again playing ex-SAS hero Jones. Sneaking in and out of secret bases will be the main ingredient, but the game won't be without some frantic full-blown action either.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Project IGI was voted by you as the best action game of last year. Bigger outdoor environments, more gadgets and weapons and greatly improved AI mean *IGI 2* could do it again.

Pack your gadgets and your guns, it's time to go in a second time

⭐ **BEHIND ENEMY LINES** Richie Shoemaker

He's not going to
go in again.

All together now...
"I'm in a wide-open
spaaace..."

It's quiet... too quiet...

"Huh?... Just a fence."

Remembered for its majestic outdoor environments, *Project IGI* was one of those games that suffered from a dual personality, for despite its title – *IGI* standing, of course, for "I'm Going In" – the game played far better outdoors than in, prompting questions as to why it wasn't called *Project IGO* instead. But the enduring dilemma with the original game wasn't its misplaced title, but the fact that it didn't quite know what it wanted to be – a stealth game or a shooter. For a while it was highly atmospheric, looked great and played well, but it was perhaps a tad too ambitious in the AI department, requiring an intelligence in excess of the *Half-Life* standard in order for the illusion of total immersion to succeed.

This, we're assured, won't be the case in the sequel. The endless supply of enemy soldiers is gone, teamwork is more important, and the game is more stealthy than shooty. This time around our ex-SAS hero Dave Jones has more Bond-style gadgets to play around with. Rather than simply wait for an enemy to pass by, we'll be able to throw stones to distract guards and mess around with equipment to cause unsuspicious distractions. Dave's map computer will be far more useful this time around and, should the need arise, players will be able to call in air strikes or specialist armoured support rather than having to rely on the one-man army approach.

Set soon after the first game, the storyline this time takes our hero from deepest Russia, to Libya and China, across arctic wastes to the open desert – 30 missions in total, where terrorist renegades threaten the Son Of Star Wars defence programme. The huge outdoor maps are again the star of the game, but this time as much care will be lavished indoors. The new savegame feature is heartily welcome (without it the original levels were just too big) and we can even expect team-focused multiplayer support for up to 16 players.

> **"The new savegame feature is heartily welcome and we can even expect team-focused multiplayer support for up to 16 players"**

As for the weapons we'll have to play with, expect a significant upgrade to the old arsenal and all the knives, pistols, machine pistols, shotguns, assault rifles, sniper rifles, grenade and rocket launchers make a welcome return, no doubt with a few extras. Certainly one of *Project IGI*'s biggest strengths was the sound effects, especially for the weapons, and it would be unrealistic to suggest the sound effects won't be bettered again. Graphically, as you can see, the improvements are already evident, and as soon as we see things in motion we'll be able to comment on the animation. Whatever the case, even with *Duke 4* and *Jedi Knight 2* on the horizon, *IGI 2* could still take top honours next year. Stranger things have happened. PCZ

Back from beyond the frontier

X²–THE THREAT

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Egosoft
PUBLISHER TBA
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Mid 2002
WEBSITE www.egosoft.com/x2

IN SUMMARY

Still of course set in space, *X²* again requires you to scour the galaxy for the most lucrative trade routes. You take on military, police and shuttle missions and eventually build factories to supplement your income while you're off saving one of the many races you have allied yourself with. The sequel is bigger and looks better, with new ships and equipment as well as, we hope, a far more effective combat structure.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL

Space trading/combat games are rare – good ones even more so. If golden oldies like *Privateer*, *Hardwar* or the venerable *Elite* series ever floated your space boat then *X²* will be a game to look forward to.

Love it or loathe it, the sequel to the classic *Elite* clone is making the jump to light speed

⭐ **SPACE COWBOY** Richie Shoemaker

That is one strange-looking asteroid.

Essential flight information is now overlaid on screen.

Captain massive Capitol ships.

Expect another half-hour intro movie.

A new graphics engine allows for hundreds of ships, factories and all manner of space junk to fill the screen.

Who knows, maybe you'll finally be able to get back to Earth this time.

t's no secret that *Elite* remains my favourite game of all time. Its atmospheric mix of trading and deep space combat, role-playing and freeform play captivated me from the moment I clapped eyes on its wireframe graphics in 1984. Egosoft too, the German developer of *X – Beyond The Frontier* are unashamed in their admiration of the Braben/Bell classic. As much as a game in its own right, *X – BTF* could be considered a tribute, one of a handful of games over the years (there's been perhaps three decent attempts) that have managed to capture the *Elite* spirit. It certainly hooked me, and occasionally still does. But the important thing is that with *X2 – The Threat*, the series will begin to find its own legs and move away, ever so slightly, from its *Elite*-inspired roots.

One problem with the original *X* was that many found the pace too slow and laborious, with little reward early on (though I found this most refreshing myself).

"It was both a plus and a minus, depending on how far you were through the game," says *X2* creator Bernd Lehahn. "We probably lost many potential players during the first few hours of gameplay because they

"The full-on dynamic economy will be in there and remains the *X* series' strongest card"

couldn't stand the slow pace. On the other hand, it made the game even more addictive once you were beyond that stage. So what we will try is to find a good balance: the game will be much easier to start and show more of its potential features early on in the game, but still the player will take a while to gain the money and knowledge to explore all the more advanced possibilities."

Of course the full-on dynamic economy will be in there and remains the *X* series' strongest card, with dozens of tradable items, from basic resources to high-tech manufactured

items built from those resources in NPC or player-controlled factories.

"We've enhanced the economy in so many different ways that it is hard to list them all," says Lehahn. "Literally hundreds of new features, some small, some big, have been added to improve what we consider one of the most important aspects of the *X* series." Lehahn then went on to list just a few: new products, new weapon systems, new ships of all sizes, new AI logic (NPC players can now man turrets on large capital ships), plus loads more besides...

"*X2 – The Threat* will be much bigger, but still include the old universe," says Lehahn. "The game will remain true to its history and fiction. Fans will recognise large parts

of the old sectors and even find stations where they used to be. Some years after the original *X – BTF* and *X – Tension*, stations and ships have been developed further, in new designs."

My biggest gripe with the original game was the combat system – the AI enemy ships were far less convincing than the impressive economy. Egosoft assure us that this has been addressed, and by introducing an enemy race called the Khaak, tell us the game will focus as much on combat as it will on trading, offering we hope, high-octane *FreeSpace*-style dogfighting action. Unfortunately we can forget about any multiplayer options: *X2 – The Threat*, like its predecessor is single-player only. *X – Online* however, you can read about on page 100.

BULLETIN

The end of year consumer blow-out is almost upon us and, although this is inevitably the busiest time for the games industry, things tend to be rather more quiet here at the newsdesk. That's because the festive season is all about world-shattering reviews and games actually being shipped instead of slipping interminably towards doomsday (though given the current climate a few tardy developers may not even make that immutable closing date). This, coupled with the fact that I spent most of the issue drinking saké and singing karaoke duets in downtown Osaka, has resulted in a rather slimmed down Bulletin section for our biggest issue of the year.

So, apologies to anyone whose favourite regular has been bumped in favour of another exclusive review, but sometimes there's simply not enough room. What with TechHead, Charts, Emulation Zone, Inside Games, The Man Who Knows, Missing In Action, Waiting To Happen, Hotshots, and our new regional focus features, there's a lot to squeeze into one section. The problem just got worse too, with LAN Rover, a new column devoted to the latest happenings in the LAN party scene (page 29). This is one more movement in PC gaming that has long been neglected by the print-based press, and one we're happy to extend our already leading-edge coverage to embrace. Brilliant one-off features like Yo! Shooty (page 24), our look at the Japanese underground coding scene in scrolling shooters, don't help matters either.

Things should return to normal soon, until which time, hang in there and endure all the damn reviews.

⬆ *Rainbow Six* meets *Apocalypse Now*.

⬆ Expect plenty of chopper action.

You've only got two ways home: death or victory.

Charlie don't surf

Meet interesting people of an ancient culture, and kill them, in *Call Sign: Charlie*

As endlessly popular as real-life theatres of war are as the settings for videogames, the Vietnam War has never enjoyed the same prevalence as other, more trendy warzones. This is especially odd considering the enduring appeal of the war as a subject for cinema, not to mention the fact that the majority of people working in the industry today were probably born during the infamous drug-addled conflict. Stranger still is the fact it has fallen to a Slovakian developer, Outsider Development, to redress the present shortfall in 'Nam-based action, with their forthcoming tactical shooter, *Call Sign: Charlie*.

Following the trend of several dozen other shooting games we've seen this month, the premise is squad-based action with a healthy dose of strategy, as you take control of a group of elite Green Berets in the unforgiving jungles of 'Nam. With its strategic planning stage and the ability to issue orders to, and switch freely between, your squad members, a more cynical publication might say '*Rainbow Six* with jungle-rot', and certainly Red Storm's game seems to be the main inspiration for this title. That, and the *Missing In Action* trilogy, of course.

The main points of departure from the Tom Clancy titles appear to be a greater emphasis on action, and the reliance on the specialist skills of various team members. Lose a certain key character and you'll be packed off back to Saigon before you can say 'poontang'.

We'll be taking a closer look at this game in a forthcoming feature on the Slovakian development scene, until which time you'll have to content yourself with these, the latest in-game screenshots.

Outsider Development • ETA Q2 2003
• www.outsiderdevelopment.sk

Spit and Polish

Polish developer Techland launches a surprise attack with shiny new shooter *Chrome*

Not, as we first assumed, a game about sniffing paint fumes or polishing your Harley-Davidson, *Chrome* is in fact a sci-fi themed first/third-person tactical shooter. And since virtually every second game we see these days fits this description, we've been forced to extend the bounds of existing nomenclature with the brave new acronym SFTF/TPTS. This is not to be confused with the other big movement in the action genre, the SBFPTS –

Squad-Based First Person Tactical Shooter (see opposite). So why all the column inches for a bandwagoneering genre-filler from an obscure Polish developer responsible for cack like *Crime Cities*? Well, because it looks bloody nice, that's why.

Techland have kept remarkably quiet about *Chrome* during development, announcing it only now when the game is nearing Alpha stage. The engine seems more than capable of rendering the huge levels in which

the game takes place, and the level of detail evident in environmental objects is very promising.

Putting you in the role of Logan, an interstellar bounty hunter, *Chrome* will require you to complete a number of missions in the conflict-torn Valkyria system. A fairly typical arsenal of weapons and gadgets will help you along your way, as well as ability-enhancing biotech implants and a range of drivable vehicles. Skipping between various planets, orbital bases

and unforgiving moons, the levels should offer plenty in terms of variety as well as sheer size, and while the game seems unlikely to divert far from familiar terrain in other respects, aspects such as this will hopefully give it a measure of distinction. It certainly looks the part at this stage, and could just be Poland's finest SFTFPS since *Mortyr*. Oh damn.

Techland • ETA Spring 2002 •
www.techland.com.pl/english/#

"I can hear them coming. There's two of them... and they're close."

Look at that grassy knoll.

Clearly stealth is not of the essence.

"Anyone else's gun smell funny?"
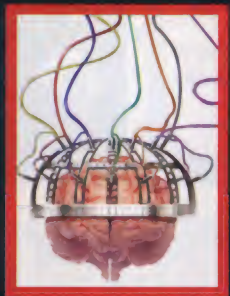
TECHHEAD

Napster gives birth to a new generation, while Intel bump up their MHz

⭐ **ELECTRIC DREAMER** Carlos Ruiz

THE FAST TRACK

MP3 buccaneers are keeping one step ahead of the game

Despite the RIAA's success in effectively shutting down the Napster network, there is now a greater level of peer-to-peer sharing of copyrighted music than when Napster was at the peak of its popularity. The user base has shifted away to a number of other alternatives, which collectively cater for considerably more members than Napster ever did.

It seems that the general consensus now is that the millions of dollars spent on legal fees by the recording industry to achieve its ends was a big waste of money. Users now have even more free content at their disposal, and more choice as to what system they use to obtain it.

The most popular method is the FastTrack network, which is decentralised with no 'middle man', making it impossible to shut down. It is utilised by three main applications – KaZaA, Grokster and Morpheus – all of which are very similar in execution, and being interlinked, bring up the same search results.

These are more advanced than their predecessor, since there is the much-needed

For more information on FastTrack, see www.fasttrack.nu

ability to resume downloads, and better still, you can search for any type of media file. For these and other reasons, file-sharing networks such as FastTrack are set to become even bigger in years to come, and they inevitably represent the future of data transfer on the Internet.

Other file-sharing applications include IMesh and Gnutella, but the second most utilised system for downloading MP3s is the web-based AudioGalaxy. This illustrates perfectly the challenges facing the recording industry, and the inherent problems that must be overcome if copyrighted music is to become truly protected.

The RIAA has become increasingly desperate in their attempts to halt the march of the file-sharing systems, and they even attempted to add a piece of legislation onto the recent US anti-terrorism bill that would have allowed them to legally hack into consumer systems and delete copyrighted files. Fortunately, this was promptly thrown out the window, and the same bill ironically makes computer cracking a terrorist act.

SPEED BUMPS

Intel is working with the latest technology in their quest for speed

BBUL or 'Bumpless Build-Up Layer' packaging will be the key to achieving Intel's previously quoted 20GHz chip within the next few years. The next-generation manufacturing process is designed to allow in excess of one billion transistors on each processor, paving the way for potentially astronomical speeds.

Instead of the conventional method of attaching the silicon die to the package, BBUL 'grows' the package around the silicon – and there are a number of advantages to this new technique. Faster performance is possible because the transistor breakthrough enables higher clock speeds, while other benefits include lower power consumption and smaller chip sizes.

High-speed copper connections ensure that data is transferred much faster than older approaches. However, it is the transistors themselves that dictate the speed. The smaller and faster they are, the faster the processor will be.

Intel is at the forefront of the field in this respect, having demonstrated the world's fastest transistors earlier

Conventional processors will be left for dead in a few years' time.

this year – running at a mind-blowing 1.5 Terahertz (which translates nicely into 1,500GHz) and featuring structures less than three atomic layers wide. Intel is also actively involved in helping the industry develop Extreme Ultra-Violet (EUV) lithography, which can print the transistors onto an extremely thin piece of silicon.

As well as enabling Intel to break further barriers in terms of pure Megahertz, the new BBUL technology will also allow for massive computing power to be unleashed in a very small space, such as in a car dashboard. With the ongoing conflict between themselves and AMD likely to continue, both parties are certainly going to require as much innovation as possible in order to stay ahead.

FACTCANNON

⭐ In a move that's sure to please people hankering after a wireless optical mouse, Microsoft have announced the release of their Wireless Intellimouse Explorer. The physical shape is similar to the bog-standard Explorer, except it weighs a little more due to the two AA batteries it requires. To keep everyone happy, it's fully customisable and there's even a variety of built-in energy-saving functions.

⭐ VIA is making a minor comeback in the unforgiving world of PC processors with their upcoming 'Pentium 4 clone', codenamed the CZA. Since VIA will be using key design concepts found in the P4, there may be friction from Intel in the form of further lawsuits against the company. The CZA will surface in 2003, manufactured in a 0.10-micron process.

⭐ In what would seem to the average layperson like a blatant attempt to confuse matters in the CPU market, AMD has given their latest range of processors codenames which bear little relation to their actual speed in MHz. Examples are as follows: Athlon XP 1800+ (1.53GHz), Athlon XP 1700 (1.47GHz), Athlon XP 1600+ (1.4GHz), Athlon XP 1500+ (1.33GHz).

⭐ Apple's new 'IPod' personal audio player is unofficially the most impressive MP3 player we've seen since the last really good one that came along. It has an ultra-fast FireWire connection that automatically uploads your entire playlist in seconds, as well as a 5Gb hard disk that can store arbitrary files as well as music. It's enough to make you want to buy a Mac! Or on second thoughts, maybe not…

⭐ Bill Gates is unlikely to be pursuing an acting career before retirement, but he's got his foot in the door after agreeing to make a guest appearance in the 200th episode of *Frasier* – the popular sitcom based in his home town of Seattle. Gates will play himself as he bores Dr Crane's radio audience with details of Microsoft's forthcoming software line-up. Not a Windows XP advertising stunt at all, then.
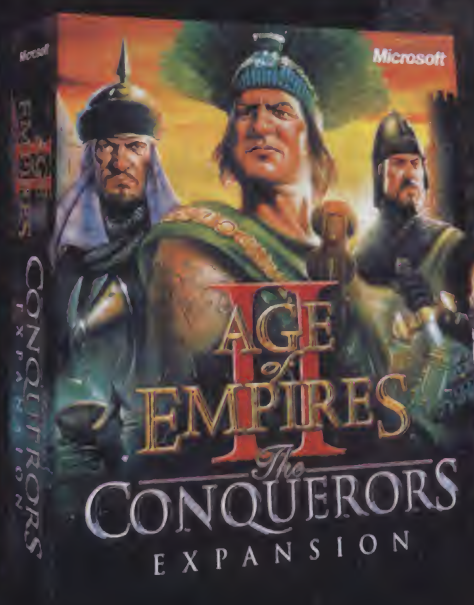
CHARTS

Everything you need to know about which games are selling by the shedload. Plus the buzz on the streets – where you tell us what's hot and what's not

Sol Campbell ~ Jaap Stam

Age 26, English ~ Age 29, Dutch

⊙ The UK's fastest selling PC game ever, or so we're told.

THE Virgin megastores TOP 10

OCT	NOV	TITLE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER	SCORE
NE	1	CHAMP MANAGER: 01/02	SPORTS INTERACTIVE	EIDOS	92%
NE	2	C&C RED ALERT 2: YURI'S REVENGE	WESTWOOD	EA	80%
NE	3	COMMANDOS 2: MEN OF COURAGE	PYRO STUDIOS	EIDOS	91%
4	4	OPERATION FLASHPOINT	BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE	CODEMASTERS	90%
RE	5	AGE OF EMPIRES II: GOLD EDITION	ENSEMBLE STUDIOS	MICROSOFT	88%
6	6	SHOGUN: MONGOL INVASION	CREATIVE ASSEMBLY	EA	83%
8	7	SIMCITY 3000 UK EDITION	MAXIS	EA	83%
7	8	BALDUR'S GATE II/BG: THRONE OF BHAAL	BIOWARE	INTERPLAY	85%/82%
NE	9	THE WEAKEST LINK	ACTIVISION	ACTIVISION	45%
NE	10	F1 2001	EA SPORTS	EA	83%

THE ChartTrack TOP 10 ELSPA

OCT	NOV	TITLE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER	SCORE
NE	1	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: 01/02	SPORTS INTERACTIVE	EIDOS	92%
NE	2	C&C RED ALERT 2: YURI'S REVENGE	WESTWOOD	EA	80%
NE	3	COMMANDOS 2: MEN OF COURAGE	PYRO STUDIOS	EIDOS	91%
NE	4	STRONGHOLD	FIREFLY	TAKE 2	84%
2	5	MAX PAYNE	REMEDY	TAKE 2	90%
RE	6	C & C: RED ALERT 2	WESTWOOD	EA	82%
4	7	OPERATION FLASHPOINT	BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE	CODEMASTERS	90%
5	8	THE SIMS: HOUSE PARTY	MAXIS	EA	50%
NE	9	RED FACTION	VOLITION	THQ	73%
7	10	THE SIMS	MAXIS	EA	86%

Compiled by Chart Track © ELSPA

THE BUZZ ON THE STREETS

For once there is actually a good selection and surprise, surprise *Champ Manager* is top!! *Commandos 2* is a great game and deserves to stay high up for a long time.

ruined

All this strategy is making my brain hurt. When are the charts gonna be full of mindless, 18-rated action like the good old days? Everything's gone all posh and normal.

Dandy_Flugle

Championship Manager? I just don't get it. *The Sims* I can perhaps understand, but how can this be the UK's most popular game? It's just fiddling around with a bunch of boring stats and player positions and trying to prove that your beloved team could, given the right set of unlikely circumstances and a gifted management brain, make it to the top of the league. There's better things to do with your time!

shuriken

Yuri's Revenge is pretty good, but I suspect people will buy any old crap Westwood churns out at this stage. I can't believe the ancient *Red Alert 2* has re-entered the charts just on the basis of an add-on. If you didn't want the game when it first came out, why do you want it now when there's an expansion for it?

crayon shin-chan

At least this month there are a few new good games in, *Red Faction*, *Yuri's Revenge* and *Commandos 2*, but why oh why is *The Sims* back in the charts? Everyone must own it at this stage.

Al Geary

CHART COMMENT
BASED ON CHART TRACK TOP 10

Will the surprises never cease? After enjoying only three weeks or so in the top spot, *Commandos 2* is relegated all the way to third place. Huge sales of the new *Champ Man 01/02* have apparently put it into the history books as the UK's fastest selling PC game. Spor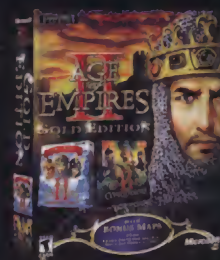ts Interactive's seasonal upgrade sold in excess of 103,000 units in one weekend, smashing the previous PC sales record of 70,000, held, scarily enough, by *Champ Man 3*. Having not been raised in this football-obsessed kingdom, I find it hard to see the attraction, but whatever gets you hot I guess. The Westwood name clearly hasn't lost its clout either, with *Yuri's Revenge* hitting number 2 and dragging *Red Alert 2* back up to number 6 in the process. *Red Faction*, meanwhile languishes in 9th place, suggesting that perhaps the bottom has fallen out of the hole-digging genre.

Anthony Holden

RETRO CHARTS

1 YEAR AGO
1. Who Wants To Be A Millionaire *(Eidos)*
2. Baldur's Gate ii *(Interplay)*
3. The Sims: Livin' It Up *(EA)*
4. Grand Prix 3 *(Hasbro)*
5. AOE ii: The Conquerors *(Microsoft)*

2 YEARS AGO
1. Tiberian Sun *(EA)*
2. Grand Theft Auto 2 *(Take 2)*
3. Rogue Spear *(Take 2)*
4. Driver *(GT Interactive)*
5. Champ Man 3 *(Eidos)*

5 YEARS AGO
1. Champ Man 96/97 *(Domark)*
2. Rally Championship *(Europress)*
3. Encarta 97 *(Microsoft)*
4. Dark Forces *(Virgin)*
5. Flight Sim 6 *(Microsoft)*

WIN THE ENTIRE VIRGIN TOP 10!

Once again, *PC ZONE* and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Top 10. All you have to do to enter the draw is answer the following simple question:

QUESTION: Which team does Steve Hill regularly lead to relegation in football management sim *Championship Manager*?

Just answer the above question and send it on a postcard, along with *all* the information requested, to the address below.
● Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
● Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
● Are you a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*?
Answers on a postcard to: *PC ZONE* Chart Compo (CPCZ13A), Dennis Publishing, PO Box 154, Bradford BD1 5RZ. Closing date: Dec 12 2001

● Terms and conditions: winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

WHAT'S FOR BAFTAS?

The BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Awards have been and gone for another year, with the top gongs going to some worthy but rather predictable contenders. *Max Payne* took out the PC game award, while *Black & White* earned two awards for interactivity and moving images. The Audience Award, the only prize determined by popular vote, went to *Championship Manager 2001*. *Shogun Total War: Warlord Edition* picked up the award for music, while in a move to put the PC development world to shame, the networked game award went to a console game – *Phantasy Star Online*. Must try harder.

LICENCED TO THE GILLS

French publisher/developer Cryo have furthered their campaign to mop up all the world's unwanted licences by acquiring the rights to make a game based on John Woo's 1997 action hit *Face/Off*. The film, based on the face-swapping antics of a top terrorist and the agent determined to bring him down, has dubious credentials as the basis for a game, but more than enough gunplay to fill a loosely related first/third-person shooter. The game is currently in development for PC, PS2 and Xbox in Cryo's Paris studio, and is expected some time in 2003.

HALF-LIFE: THE FILM?

Valve Software have initiated a passionate debate on the Net with the announcement that they're considering selling the rights for the production of a *Half-Life* movie. Several interested filmmakers have approached them, and they are now seeking feedback from fans as to whether they'd pay to see a *Half-Life* movie, and if so who/what they'd like to see in it. You can give them your two pennies' worth by emailing movie@valvesoftware.com

Embattled Realms

Strap on a codpiece and sharpen your halberd, it's *Lords Of The Realm III*

Generally catering to serious medieval buffs and hardcore political strategists, we never thought the *Lords Of The Realm* series was likely to cross over into more mainstream RTS acceptance. With the recent release of the first screenshots of *Lords Of The Realm III*, however, we've had to rethink our stance. With a pristine new 3D engine in place and the same in-depth strategic gameplay as its predecessors, *Lords III* is looking remarkably compelling.

The series has always been keen to embrace more than just siege warfare and military scheming in its strategic remit, and the latest incarnation shows no signs of change. Conquering lands, building castles and real-time battling are of course a large part of the game, but you'll also be required to manage your lordly estate, engage in courtly diplomacy, grow crops, trade with nearby towns, recruit and arm soldiers and all sorts of other feudal busywork. But while the game is clearly obsessive when it comes to simulating the life of a medieval lord, historical accuracy is refreshingly being downplayed in favour of creating an entertaining vision of feudal Europe.

While still unlikely to stray from the more hardcore reaches of the RTS spectrum, *Lords III* seems sure to succeed in expanding its influence across our lands, and we'll make sure to bring you a full preview as soon as it hits playable form.

Impressions Games • ETA late 2002 • www.lords3.com

Business as usual in the Merseyside derby.

The shiny new look should bring the series to a whole new audience.

Once more into the breach

No quiet on the Western front, in *1914 – The Great War*

Fully 3D turn-based strategy games set in the First World War – what are they good for? Absolutely nothing, or so you might think given the stigma attached to turn-based strategy these days. But as long as they manage to keep pace graphically with their real-time counterparts they'll have their place. And fortunately that's exactly what the newly announced *1914 – The Great War* appears to be doing, given these, the first two rather pretty pics from the game.

Putting you in the boots of a mid-ranked officer on the front line in Western Europe, *1914* will ask you to prove your strategic mettle in a series of ultra-realistic mission-based confrontations. Of course, it looks like you'll only be able to fight on the German side, which may ruffle a few feathers.

German developer TriNodE was previously responsible for the 3D RTS *RIM – Battle Planets*, and the project is being headed by Bernhard Ewers, the man behind the fondly remembered *History Line 1914-1918*. Might be all right then, especially if these pics are any indication of what the engine is capable of.

TriNodE Entertainment • ETA Q2 2002

⊕ Looking good, but are these in-engine pics or renders...?

⊕ We will destroy the British infidels!

⊕ David O'Leary's rent-a-thug midfield up to no good again.

⊕ Fantastic hair, but how does the damn game play?

Thatch of the Day

The beautiful game goes follicle-crazy in *UEFA Champions League Season 2001/2002*

L et's start off with a highly contentious remark: every football game on the PC to date has been crap. Even *FIFA* has never replicated the feel of the game in the way that the *ISS* series does on the PlayStation.

UEFA Champions League Season 2001/2002 will enable you however to shun the domestic competition in favour of the two-tier league and knockout that provides teams like Man United with the financial stability to turn the Premiership into a Formula One-type procession.

As well as playing as any of the 32 teams in this year's competition, the game promises 'unparalleled AI' and a new game engine with improved character models using something called the 'Motion Morph 8-point animation system'. Even if the game is muck this should brighten things up, with the promise of facial animation and animated hair effects.

We haven't seen the gameplay yet, so we're not in a position to comment on the action, but as long as it features a hotkey to force Barthez and Brown to collide comically as the ball slides past we'll be more than happy.

Silicon Dreams • ETA Christmas

Heavenly ORBs

Strategy First's *Homeworld* beater *O.R.B.* nears completion

W ith *Homeworld 2* steadfastly refusing to reveal itself, space strategy fans might find solace in these stunning new screenshots of *O.R.B.*, the fully 3D interstellar RTS currently approaching completion at Strategy First. Clearly heavily influenced by Relic's groundbreaking title, *O.R.B.* has picked up the gauntlet and attempted to push the genre into all-new territory. Unlike *Homeworld*, *O.R.B.'s* playfield includes delights such as planetary objects, suns, large asteroids and dynamic interactive terrain. A real physics engine is also in place, promising spectacularly convincing effects in the weightless confrontations of distant space.

The premise of the game sees the two playable races in conflict over mineral deposits in a large asteroid belt, and will offer a deeply story-driven campaign mode. The developers assure us that simple resource gathering and climbing the tech tree are not expected to pass for strategy in *O.R.B.*, and that they have aimed to offer a far greater depth of tactical possibilities than their competitors. A streamlined interface and information system has also been implemented, in an attempt to make the traditionally hardcore space strategy genre a shade more accessible.

Previously slated for release this month, *O.R.B.* has now been pushed back to early next year, so expect Martin to strap himself in for a review in the next couple of issues.

Strategy First • ETA Jan 2002 • www.o-r-b.com

Plenty of heavenly bodies so you don't lose your bearings.

⊕ *Homeworld 2* could have its work cut out.

⊕ Look at that physics engine go.

Athletes train and fuel their bodies to achieve maximum performance. Nutritionists advise us to eat a well balanced diet to maintain a healthy heart, body and mind. But, how do we go about improving our overall performance?

Because A Lot Can Happen In A Second

IT'S WHAT'S INSIDE THAT MATTERS

The new Hercules **3D Prophet Titanium** line-up of graphic accelerator cards, offer powerful and highly featured 3D solutions to enhance the new 3D effects used by games developers, in turn bringing you the ultimate in graphics stimulation!

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The 3D Prophet III Titanium 500 board is clocked at 240MHz core and ultra-fast 250MHz DDR RAM. In addition to the high-resolution TV-Output, the board also supports a DVI-Output to play DVD-Videos and games on digital flat panels.

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www.hercules-uk.com

EMULATION ZONE

With more than 3,000 old arcade games now supported by MAME, you wouldn't think there could possibly be many "families" of '80s/'90s coin-ops still left unemulated. When will you learn, eh? Despite the recent "fall" of Capcom's CPS-2 system (home of practically every major 2D fighting game of the last decade), there are still a couple of coin-op tech standards eluding the grasp of emulators, most notably Sega's Model 1 board, which played host to many of the earliest polygon games including groundbreaking moments such as *Virtua Fighter* and *Virtua Racing*. Until recently the "wanted" list also included Model 1's Sega predecessor, System 32, which ran some little-seen but classic titles like the *Sonic The Hedgehog* arcade game and the obscure final game in the *Out Run* series, *Out Runners*.

However, these twin stalwarts have been dealt a crushing blow with the recent release of the latest version of *Modeler*. Made by the people who brought you *The Impact* (a superb but short-lived

emu, which did a great job of running several 3D arcade beat 'em ups like *Street Fighter Ex Plus*, *Rival Schools* and *Toshinden 2*, but was never updated after a controversial first release), this is an emu which, despite its name, offers pretty complete replication of the workings of System 32

and still-preliminary Model 1 support. None of the Model 1 games can be played yet (most of them only display backdrops, no polygons), but a large proportion of System 32 games, including *Golden Axe 2* and *Spider-Man*, run beautifully and with full sound. It's well worth a play, especially since *Out Runners* was designed in the arcades primarily as a two-player game (unlike the previous *Out Runs*, there's almost no computer-controlled traffic), and Modeler takes full advantage of the Kaillera online-gaming code (see last month's column) to provide you with some particularly fine head-to-head Internet racing. And the day Model 1 finally gives up its secrets and lets you do the same with *Virtua Racing*, your correspondent will be a very happy man indeed.

"I told you we'd never find a late-night pizza joint around here."
"Shut up."

LINKS

- Modeler homepage
- www.impactemu.com

⬆ *Arabian Fight*: clever wording, cheers.

⬆ Shortly to be followed by "Thwerp!" and "K'toing!"

VISUAL PINBALL TABLE OF THE MONTH

One of the last tables to ever enjoy real success in arcades, *Theatre Of Magic* (Bally, 1995) was a well-deserved hit due to its super-fast playfield and feature-packed design, which kept the ball whizzing around loops and ramps and rarely gave the player a moment to stop and draw breath. This VP version showcases a trick known as "decal modding", by which clever artists get around the fact that Visual Pinball can't draw graphics on vertical surfaces. The technique involves super-imposing photographs over the top of the table and it looks amazingly close to the real thing. So far there is only one person creating these mods (they're also responsible for several more, including Dave's favourite, *White Water*), but the website contains simple and easy-to-follow instructions, so if you fancy getting involved in the VP world but don't fancy tackling the mysteries of Visual Basic just yet, this might be a good place to start. Check out the Reasonably Satisfactory World Of Pinball at http://vpinball.topcities.com.

➔ *Theatre Of Magic*, featuring Zoë Ball and Kirsty Gallacher, it would seem.

YO! SHOOTY

So the Japanese don't like PCs and PCs don't like frenetic 2D shooters? *Stuart Campbell* digs a bit deeper and finds something strange and wonderful under the surface

f there's one thing games fans really like to do, it's argue . There's hardly anything on which the entire gaming community can be said to agree. For everyone who acknowledges that Shigeru Miyamoto makes the world's best games, there's someone else saying: "No, it's Peter Molyneux". For everyone who thinks *Grand Prix* or *Gran Turismo 3* is the best racing game of all time, there's another pointing out that they're both over-hyped borefests of

🔼 There are also many horizontal-scrollers, like *Planet Force*.

garage-mechanic simulators that have about as much resemblance to true motor racing as they do to pigeon-fancying. But even in our flame-happy little world, there are a few things everyone recognises as simple, undeniable fact.

One is that the PC has never been a hotbed of decent arcade-style 2D shoot 'em ups in the vein of console epics such as *Giga Wing* or *Radiant Silvergun* – PC owners being far too snobby to enjoy such simple blasting antics. And another, perhaps related, 'fact' is that Japanese people have no interest

whatsoever in the PC, seeing it as a monstrously huge piece of expensive junk that doesn't work properly. (And since most Japanese people live in flats the size of a phonebox's kitchen but have to pay about 93 per cent of their wages in rent and have to work 23 hours a day, it's easy to understand why a game machine that spends half its time crashing and is eight times the size and ten times the price of a console doesn't seem like an attractive idea to them.) However, chums, like almost everything we think we know, these ideas are, in

❝ The PC has never been a hotbed of decent arcade-style 2D shoot 'em ups in the vein of console epics ❞

fact, complete cack. Why? You've obviously never heard of Nipon Shoot-'Em-Ups.

LAND OF THE RISING GUNSHIP

Seemingly alone in the world, the Japanese are still big fans of 2D scrolling shoot 'em ups – the Dreamcast was particularly well served with a raft of examples, mostly from arcade specialists Capcom, who brought arcade hits like *Giga Wing*, *Gunbird 2* and *Mars Matrix* to the doomed Sega console. Sadly, the 3D-obsessed West has all but forgotten about the sort of simple twitch entertainment that

made us all love games so much in the first place. But in one of those twists of enthusiasm-led fate that makes all the hassle of owning a PC as a games platform worthwhile, Japanese PC owners have given birth to an entire community of coders dedicated to creating dozens of modern 2D shoot 'em ups (generically identified in Japan as 'STGs', which I'm guessing comes from 'ShooTing Games'). And what's more, they're practically all free.

The world of Nipon Shoot-'Em-Ups (that being the correct punctuation) is one of the most obscure niches in PC gaming, but a highly populated one. Assuming you can make some head-way into any of the websites (unusually for the Web, English-language sites are almost unheard of), you'll find hundreds of games, mostly created by teams of just one or two people, yet boasting production values the equal of much commercial software. And more importantly, gameplay you could hang your hat on.

Taking a formula that's been honed and refined over years of practice, Japanese STGs offer a gameplay experience where the rules are mostly the same (the rush towards ludicrous screen-obliterating power-ups that once characterised games in this genre has actually been abandoned in favour of a simpler and more narratively coherent system where you start the game with most of your weaponry already installed) and the effort has gone into the design of the levels to ensure the game remains challenging right to the end. As compared to

THE WESTERN APPROACH

🔼 Apogee's *Raptor*: dull.

🔼 *Star Monkey*: not dull.

Why can't we do it?

The question that's unanswered is why does it take the world's least PC-friendly market to produce these great PC games? After all, it's not like it's a cultural thing – us Western types like to shoot things just as much as the Japanese do. But you have to go back six years to find the last halfway-competent Western attempts at doing a scrolling shooter on the PC, and halfway-competent is a generous description of most of them. The most high-profile titles back then were Apogee's *Raptor* and Epic's *Tyrian 2*, and they're both textbook examples on how *not* to do the job – slow, tedious, badly balanced and generally crap. Which would seem to answer our question – rubbish games made people not want scrolly shoot 'em ups anymore, so nobody made any good ones. Well, almost nobody. A little company called Small Rockets does seem to have picked up the mantle. Check out *Star Monkey* on issue 108's cover CD or at www.smallrockets.com for a demo. It's fast, frenetic and it's got a fantastic name, although it wouldn't strictly qualify as a true Nipon shooter.

WE ARE GENTLE SERVICE

I sense that death
is imminent.
Sexy death.

Aren't foreigners funny?

One of the best things about Nipon Shoot-'Em-Ups, of course, is having to trawl through Japanese websites trying to find them, and encountering descriptions like this:

'Leads you into areas like The Present Of Okinawa Taste (Do not leak GOYA (NIGAURI) of the Okinawa production and it is given to an applicant. Okinawa production articles other than GOYA are also under present.) and EcoDive (Best dive plan making free. We are gentie service. So, don't warry be happy) and the "Okinawan Indie Band", The Crankshafters.'

OK, so it's easy to have a chuckle at funny Japlish and its accompanying game names. But let's face it, they're a lot less embarrassing than

'Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Magick Obscura', so let's not feel too smug about it, eh? Anyway, how could you fail to feel more exciting and glamorous playing games with titles like these?

LUNATIC PRINCESS: TOWER OF HANUI
MORNING BREAD HINA
STRIKE BACK OF A NOT BAKA-GAME
SEXY DEATH
SEXY DEATH 2: LUNATIC FORCE
BLAST NOODLES
EXCESS FRACTION
GO! GO! TWENTY-FIVE
2001 SEXUAL VIOLET WONDER 3
MAID OF THE SHOPPING

Uh-oh, you're in trouble.

then reflect all the enemy's bullets right back at them, which is almost stupidly enjoyable.

VERTICALLY CHALLENGED

Most of all, these are games that test your skill, not your endurance. This isn't *Max Payne*, where you quicksave outside every doorway and keep repeating every room until you win. You can't win by inches here. Mess up in a Nipon Shoot-'Em-Up and you've blown it, especially since most of the games are focused towards high scores rather than completion – you generally get infinite continues and can 'finish' on your first go, but there's usually a trademark scoring system where the points get higher the longer you stay alive and reset whenever you get killed or use a superweapon. Also, many games have, or are even

> **These games are addictive in a way that simply hasn't been seen on the PC for years**

previously, when it was about amassing a virtually impregnable ship by the middle of level two and then sellotaping the fire button down and going to the pub. And with the power of modern technology at hand, this is most often achieved by filling the screen with astounding amounts of mathematically-patterned enemy fire and leaving you to weave a nerve-racking path through the geometrical blizzard. The payoff more often than not comes in the form of the 'reflect shield', a staple weapon of Japanese STGs, which allows you to charge up a barrier and

solely comprised of, 'Score Attack' modes where you play a single level or timed interval at a time. If you haven't played a scoring-based game for a while, (I can't even remember the last big PC game where scoring points was even recorded, never mind being the main objective), you'll probably be amazed at how compelling it is. We've all become soft, forgotten the concept of being punished for failure in skill. These games are addictive in a way that simply hasn't been seen on the PC for years, where the sheer surprise of being told your game is over after 45

seconds sees you stabbing furiously at the Start button over and over again.

We don't even have the room here to start telling you about the best games, or the companies like the fantastically named Twinkle Soft who set so many of the benchmarks that others follow. The best thing you can do is head to the address at the end of the feature and just start downloading. (Though we've scattered a few screenshots of some of the more excellent games around to get you started.) Most of these games pack themselves into no more than 5Mb, so you've really got no excuse. Unless, that is, you're scared.

http://emudek.metropoli2000.com/shootemup/index-eng.html

⬆ It wouldn't be Japanese if you weren't playing an enormous muscle-bound goon with a tiny animal's head.

⬆ Twinkle Soft's *Rally Raid* is pretty damn slick.

⬆ *Storm Caliber Revival Edition 99*: busy.

⬆ There's a sizeable sub-genre of 3D shooters too, like *Kamui*.

INSIDE GAMES

Having three lives was all very well when you were a scrolling spaceship or a pill-eating yellow circle, but as games become more realistic and sophisticated, what does dying really mean? *Mark Hill* goes flatlining to find out

A few months ago there was a report from Singapore, where a 16-year-old *Counter-Strike* player took out a knife during a network game and stabbed a fellow player. The reason? Revenge. The other player had just killed him within the game using a virtual knife.

This may be an extreme example, but as gamers, we're spending more time leading alternate lives, becoming characters in virtual worlds. And where there is life, there must also be death, the ultimate event. Philosophies and religions have been created over the ages to explain it and to comfort us about it, but could it be that we're unconsciously internalising game deaths as a way of coping with the real thing?

I'm not saying that avid *Quake* players think that if they're hit by a bus in the street then they'll instantly respawn on the other side of the pavement holding only a basic machine gun. That would be like suggesting they're likely to go to school with a rocket launcher to blow their classmates away. But, in an increasingly secular age, it could well be that games are replacing religion in providing reassurance that death is not the end. This isn't as far-fetched as it may at first seem. After all, when the

Remember the simple days, when you had three lives before starting over?

big D does finally come to us, at least we can say we've practiced for it often enough.

JESUS QUICKSAVES
People often point to *Final Fantasy VII* as the first instance where the death of a character actually mattered, with grown men admitting to wiping a tear from their eye when one of the protagonists snuffed it. But, in a way, it's mattered ever since videogames were invented. Alright, so *Pong* has little to offer in the way of afterlife theories, but it wasn't long before the concept of three lives became

You can't escape the Grim Reaper.

TRUST ME, I'M NOT A DOCTOR

If you thought playing *The Sims* gave you responsibility for a virtual life you should have played *Life And Death*, a quirky little title from 1988, where you played a surgeon performing simulated surgery on patients. The first game concentrated on abdominal illnesses and a sequel appeared a couple of years later focusing on brain problems. You don't get concepts like that anymore.

Life And Death, crying out for an update.

But the *Groundhog* approach probably finds its fullest expression in first person shooters such as *Half-Life*. Just as Bill Murray went a little further each day with Andie McDowell until he learned how to woo her, gamers quicksave every time they turn a corner or open a door. If the enemy surprises you from the ceiling and tears you to bits, you quickload and go in next time with guns pointing skywards. And dying in *Half-Life* is particularly nasty, because there is a fundamental difference between first-person death and third-person death. It's not the same thing seeing Lara Croft being impaled by three-foot stakes or falling from a great height to land like a broken doll than it is experiencing death through the eyes of your character. Think of the world spinning to a floor point of view in *Half-Life* as you hear your bones crunch and see the scattered remains of skull and brain slop the walls.

GHOST IN THE MACHINE
But what about afterlife experiences other than instant reincarnation and metempsychosis? What about the great tunnel of light?

The free roaming disembodied spirit you can become in *Counter-Strike* – watching your team mates play on – is probably the closest you get in

> **"When the big D does finally come to us, at least we can say we've practiced for it often enough"**

widespread. When you played *Space Invaders* you knew you could afford to die twice before total oblivion loomed. But now that games are more sophisticated and can't make you start at the very beginning every time you die, they need to offer other solutions.

The brilliant *Planescape: Torment* gives you an immortal character, The Nameless One, who reappears every time he's struck down, even when all he wants is to end his suffering. This is the *Groundhog Day* approach to death. No matter how many times you get things wrong – so wrong, in fact, that you die – you can come back and give it another shot, wiser for the experience.

games to life after death. Stanley Kubrick, defending *The Shining* against allegations that it was dark and depressing, said that any supernatural film was by nature optimistic and uplifting, because ghosts are evidence that there is something after death. The same could be said of any game in which death does not hold any particular finality. Though when you think about it, it seems strange that games haven't tapped into this more. *Vampire – The Masquerade* gave us a taste of what it feels like to be the powerful monster instead of the blue-eyed hero fighting the forces of evil, but imagine a game where you were a

The immortal *Planescape: Torment*.

ghost. Think of the possibilities. Peeking in the girls' locker-rooms, haunting people you didn't like, having poltergeist tantrums or, erm, peeking in girls' locker-rooms. Or how about a game version of *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)*? All you'd need to do is take the 3D engine from any first-person shooter and remove the clipping, thereby allowing you to float in the air and walk through doors and walls. Simple, really.

(Several games have toyed with this idea, though none have satisfactorily explored the myriad gameplay possibilities. That said, there are two games currently in development based on being a ghost or ghosts. *Hauntings*, in development at *Gilbert Goodmate* developer Prelusion, and Empire Interactive's *Ghost Master*.)

But it's not all reassuring. Even the atheistic vision of death finds its place in a popular *Counter-Strike* option, designed to stop the deceased from cheating. In this mode, whenever you die the screen goes black for the rest of the round. A stray bullet condemns you to utter oblivion, with no appeal to concepts of limbo, purgatory or afterlife. (Except that you can still talk to your fellow ghosts, usually to say things like: "This black screen thing sucks.") Perhaps this is the biggest reason for *Counter-Strike*'s success: once you're dead, you're out of the game. And that's something we can all relate to.

DEAD AGAIN

But what we have here isn't a replacement for religion – which provides the total reassurance that death is not the end – but a fantasy of death. You jump into a game, assume a role (whether it's an antiquated floating spaceship or a sophisticated RPG character) and you can enjoy the brief period of time when losing a life doesn't mean total annihilation. It's about momentary pleasure, not some transcendental realisation.

You could argue that the vast – for a computer game anyway – freedom that *Deus Ex* offers could help you to be a more moral person because you can act out different actions to see their consequences. But the truth is that we use this freedom to transgress all the rules that normal life imposes, and that includes death as the end.

All the tabloid and moralistic critics who condemn games like *Grand Theft Auto* or *Doom* not only forget that your victims are little more than fairground target ducks, but also that the whole experience is just a fantasy where we have absolute power over life and death. If games ever become advanced enough to produce enemy AI so realistic, even to the point of being sentient, that we feel morally obliged not to pull the trigger, we could have a problem. For the moment though, let's enjoy death while we can. And try not to hurt the people you play *Counter-Strike* against. PCZ
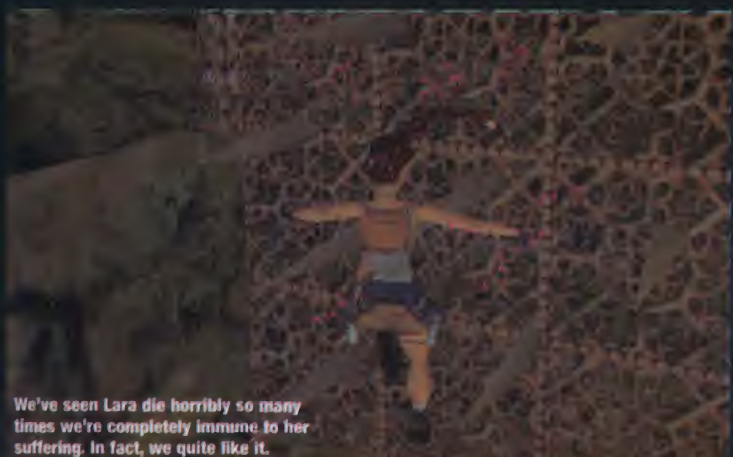
We've seen Lara die horribly so many times we're completely immune to her suffering. In fact, we quite like it.

THE GROUNDHOG WAY

Or How To Quicksave Your Way Through Life

Oh dear, those look dangerous. Better hit F6.

Aha, I made it. But here they come again. Quick, hit F6 again!

Bollocks, it got me. Never mind. Now, what was the quickload button again?

I AM GOD

Cheat death, literally

If only we could get up every morning, have a shower and bring down the console before breakfast to type in the words GODMODE... how much easier life would be. And think how much you'd save on life insurance. Many people don't see the point of cheating in games. It's a bit like fixing the cards in a game of *Solitaire*. But you can't argue that being invulnerable for a while is a fantasy we all want to act out, a bit like dressing up in a Superman costume when you were a kid. Just remember to turn the goddamn Godmode off and play the game properly. Goddamn it.

The Man who KNOWS

MORE DESPAIR

A **sick** new game has been slammed for its terrifying similarity to current world events. Set in the **Middle East**, the chillingly titled *Real War* centres on a US response to a terrorist attack, and is being openly sold to teenagers in shops across **America**. Players are forced to choose between fighting for the **US Army** or the **Independent Liberation Army**, and can utilise an array of weapons of mass destruction, including cruise missiles and nuclear warheads. The game is published by **Simon & Schuster**, who were also responsible for the pornographic *Panty Raider*. Spokesman **Peter Binazeski** denied that *Real War* was set in Afghanistan, and scoffed at the notion of any similarity. "To be honest, it's a shit game that we're hoping will sell because of the war," he didn't add.

Meanwhile, the US Army is teaming up with **Pandemic Studios** to create games set on the modern battlefield. A PC title, known as *CS-12*, is planned, and as well as providing funding, the US Army will also use its **Training & Doctrine Command** bureau to assist with its development, the idea being that the game will be used to help train future military commanders. **Richard Lindheim** of the army-operated **Institute for Creative Technologies**, bleated: "While offering unique training aids for potential squad leaders or captains, these products will also teach game players everywhere about how to leverage human resources and information, skills that will benefit them enormously in their professional lives." Especially if they are in the Army.

The impending **Armageddon** may have an adverse effect on the planned *Tomb Raider* movie sequel. Producer **Larry Gordon** blathered: "We have a script, and **Paramount** wants to make it, but people not wanting to shoot overseas is now more of a concern. Though now is probably the ideal time to travel with security at the airports being beefed up, some actors are going to be reluctant to hop on a plane." **Angelina Jolie** has agreed to reprise her role as **Lara Croft**, but Gordon believes her recent appointment as a goodwill ambassador to the **United Nations** makes her security an even higher priority. He wept: "I'm very concerned about the safety of the crew, of me and Angelina, and everyone else. If something happens and things get worse and you can't fly, well, you can't fly." After the insipid mess that was the first film, let's hope that a sequel never sees the light of day.

In vaguely positive other news, a gamer is claiming that reactions honed playing *Unreal Tournament* helped him to save a girl's life. Audio-visual technician **Scott Abernethy** of Wellington, **New Zealand**, snatched cyclist **Rebecca Cross** away from the wheels of a truck that crushed her bike. Abernethy, who uses the pseudonym **Hell Is Other People**, later bragged: "It was just like supporting the flag during a sudden death play off. Not something you do every day in real life, but in *UT* you learn that you're either quick or dead." The daft twat.

Ruthless SOB, isn't he? And he's just a medic.

Fighting for the greater glory of mother Russia.

Hammer Time

Operation Flashpoint add-on and Gold Edition bundle ready for launch

Just last issue we brought the new *Operation Flashpoint* add-on, *Red Hammer: The Soviet Campaign*, to your attention, and now it is fast approaching release. For those who weren't paying attention, *Red Hammer* will give you the chance to play the other side of the hostilities as you step into the shoes of comrade Dimitri Lukin, a disgraced Spetsnaz officer attempting to regain his rank. The new campaign, as seen in these new screens, clocks in at a hefty 20 new missions, along with new cut-scenes, Russian-accents and whatnot.

The filthy decadent capitalists at Codemasters are releasing the add-on both as a standalone Gold Upgrade for £9.99, and as part of the new full-price *Operation Flashpoint Gold Edition*. The upgrade pack includes the new campaign, all the previously downloadable upgrades and a copy of the *Operation Flashpoint* Prima Strategy Guide. The Gold Edition contains the latest patched up version of the full game, *Red Hammer*, and the strategy book thingy.

Sounds reasonable. But is it really choice, comrades, or just the illusion of choice?

Bohemia Interactive • ETA November 30 • www.codemasters.com/flashpoint/redhammer/front.htm

⬆ Let's go make some crazy money.

⬆ Tennis so real, you can almost smell the strawberries...

Mixed doubles

Two of the biggest Sega smashes are heading to your PC in 2002

Two of the finest arcade and Dreamcast games ever released by Sega are on their way to the PC courtesy of Sega and Empire. Strawberry-munchers will be jumping the net with the news that the brilliant *Virtua Tennis* is on its way, although with *Virtua Tennis 2* out in the arcades and on the Dreamcast we've got the right to feel ever so slightly cheated as well. The other release of note is *Crazy Taxi*, the riotous driving game based on earning fares by transporting passengers to their rightful destinations on time, a concept that is studiously ignored by real-life cabbies all across London.

With the Dreamcast now officially dead and buried, and Sega concentrating on what it does best (making great games), we can only hope that if these two titles are a success it might convert other arcade classics in a more timely fashion.

Empire Interactive • ETA 2002 • www.empireinteractive.com

⬆ Could easily become the best tennis game on PC.

Here we go again...

Looking past the surface of Another War

This game from Polish developer Mirage Interactive has slipped by us unnoticed until now, not surprising considering it's an unassuming little isometric RPG aimed at a casual gaming audience, featuring lacklustre graphics and supported by a fairly shabby homepage. On closer inspection, however, it may just hold a measure of charm, as it is hoping to offer humour, complex character development and witty cross-textual references. This could all be disastrous of course, but some *Diablo*-style real-time battling and a deep and immersive storyline are also promised.

The plot would have you taking the role of a mercenary and adventurer trapped in occupied Europe, trying to save an old buddy from the Nazi regime and getting caught up in secret military projects. The slated release date is only weeks away, and if it actually comes off we'll have a review to you before you know it. However, at this stage an Easter release seems more likely.

Mirage Interactive • ETA December • www.anotherwar.com

🠉 The simple combat will be secondary to the RPG elements.

🠉 Quality dialogue and a good translation will be vital.

The Running Man

Rayman returns to the PC, and brings some friends

France's most endearing slice of gaming IP is set to make a return to our PC screens this Christmas, in the first ever multiplayer outing in the *Rayman* series, *Rayman M*. Though the premise is to get all the characters from the *Rayman* universe together and let them race and battle each other, Ubi Soft have thankfully not gone down the 'Super Rayman Kart' path, opting instead for an intense platform-fuelled game involving running, jumping, flying, shooting and trap-setting. Eight existing characters such as Globox, Ly, the fairy and Rayman himself will be present, with several more to be unlocked, and the game will take place in 12 rich cartoon environments lifted straight from *Rayman 2*.

Each character will be endowed with skills and agility equal to Rayman, meaning plenty of sliding, climbing, helicopter jumps and shooting of lums. We'll bring you a full review next month.

Ubi Soft • ETA November • www.raymanarena.com

🠉 The PC is hardly Rayman's natural habitat...

🠉 ...but this looks set to offer some decent multiplayer fun.

MAILBOX

Feel the need for a rant? Then grab a pen, write it down and put it in the postbox addressed to us. If it's interesting enough we'll print it

⭐ ANSWERED BY Dave Woods

SUPER PRIZES TO BE WON

PC ZONE is giving away not one, but two of these wonderful GameVoice contraptions from Microsoft to the writer of the Star Letter. If we don't consider any of the letters to be worthy we'll just keep them for ourselves. Using the GameVoice, you can communicate with other players online and give yourself a massive advantage over the Luddites who have to stop and type instructions. They're priced at £49.99 each and are worth every single penny.

LOVE IT...

I've just checked out your new website and I think it's brilliant, despite the fact that I've just checked out my world ranking and I'm not even in the top 100,000. Must try harder I suppose... Am I allowed to say that I've got a PS2 as well as a PC in this mag? Well I have and the new site design means that I can check out all my console game news without leaving the hallowed grounds of the *PC ZONE* arena.

I do have one complaint, though. I've checked out the forums and I noticed you haven't got your own anymore, just general ones filled with spotty teenage console kids from the *C&VG* site. Come on *PC ZONE*, sort it out.

Tim White

⭐ Consider it done – we now have our very own forum.

HATE IT...

About time the *PC ZONE* website was updated but woe is me. Little did I realise this meant your great site was going to be swallowed by the Dennis corporate behemoth *C&VG* site. Yes, I know this fits in nicely with some Dennis suit's idea of a single gaming portal (saving some moolah perhaps) but if I want tiny, twee icons in a blue-grey colour scheme, I would have used the *C&VG* site before now. I can't find the important stuff as easily as before and I want a separate *PC ZONE*, PC-exclusive site back again!

Gavin Hay

⭐ Pretty soon you'll be able to choose from a load of custom skins, which means you'll be able to make the *ZONE* site look how you want it. As for the content, just click on PC in the Filter Tab and you'll jettison all the unwanted console stuff, leaving you with *ZONE's* content and a second opinion from the PC boys over at *C&VG*.
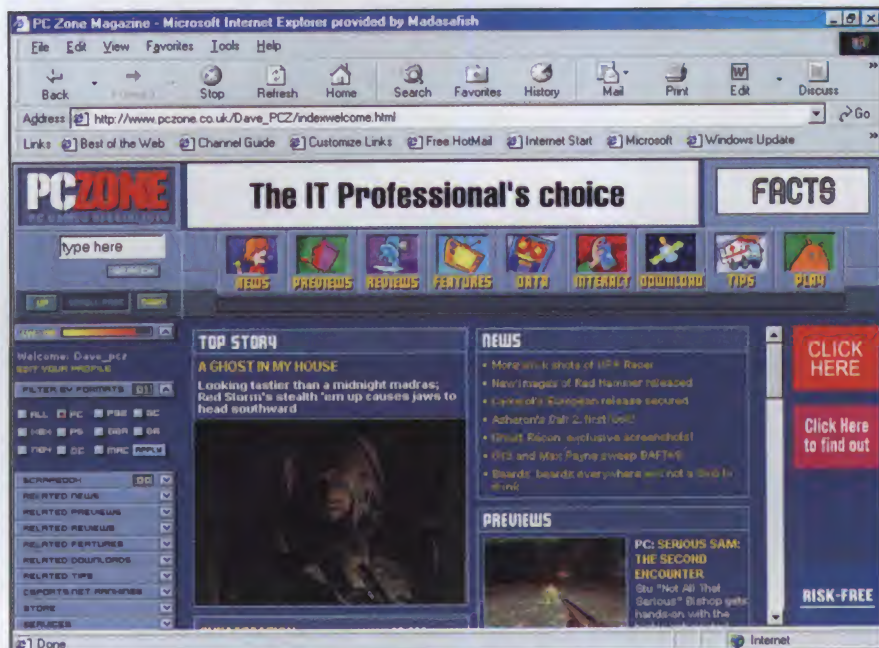
⬆ Come on, the new website is up and running, let us know what you think of it.

FACE ACHE

I've thoroughly enjoyed reading all of the new Reality Checks, but last issue's made me laugh so much I almost forgot how to breathe. I do love you guys but I'm also eternally jealous of the fact that you get paid to play games and it is good to see that in spite of having the best jobs in the world you have to get down and dirty every now and again.

If you're not sure what I'm talking about, check out Steve's mug in the re-enactment special. I haven't seen anyone look as miserable in my life. Mind you, looking at the other characters in the frame I don't blame him. Just what is that creepy woman in red smiling about and why is Steve using his shield to prevent a rearguard action? Are the events connected?

John Harding

⭐ You won't be pleased to hear that to make up for the trauma we sent him to a strip club with Jimmy White this month. Check out this month's Reality Check on page 126 for the details.

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE?

I was reading the Comment in the last issue and suddenly got so angry I had to write in. So the terrorists used *MS Flight Sim* to learn how to fly the planes and crash them into the Twin Towers? Yeah right. So a multi-million pound operation that took years to plan down to the last bit of detail hinged on just a £40 piece of software? Do me a favour.

The fact that national newspapers are willing to print this sort of stuff is astounding. They must know it's not true, which means that they're deliberately printing sensationalist stories to sell more copies. Take this to the end and it means that papers are profiting from the tragedy. OK, call me stupid if you want, and I know that tabloids have been doing this sort of stuff for years, but this time it left a pretty sour taste in my mouth. I certainly won't be buying that particular publication ever again.

Tim Forsythe

CAN'T GIVE IT AWAY

I have just purchased the December issue of your fine publication, and was surprised at the time to be asked if I wanted to have a free copy of the *Daily Mail* with it. Strange, I thought.

> **❝What shapes a terrorist is not what games they play... it's the beliefs they take on board, inspired by their role models❞**
>
> **IAN FISHWICK IS DISGUSTED BY THE NEWSPAPERS**

Why give away a newspaper with *PC ZONE*? Surely *PC ZONE* aren't trying to sway my choice of the more boring forms of reading matter? The news on TV usually has a much less political sway, reporting events up to date and more accurately than newspapers ever will, so what would I want a newspaper for? If I wanted to know the weather, I'd watch the forecast with that nice woman. If I want the

Better than *Half-Life*? Korda thinks so.

news I'll read Teletext or watch it on television. But of course, that was not the intended effect.

I read the magazine, particularly the opening Editor's letter and EndZone comment. And it all became clear. The *Daily Mail* is behind the further scapegoating of videogames for all the world's evils. Well, that *is* surprising.

It has been said before, but what shapes our children is not what they watch or play, but who they have as role models. And what shapes a terrorist is not what games they play or films they watch or even the music they listen to... it's the beliefs which they take on board, inspired by their role models.And it's about time certain

You seriously like these? That's just wrong.

newspapers and journalists realised that.

Ian Fishwick

⊙ **There is a very good reason why certain shops are desperately *trying* to give the *Daily Mail* away.**

BETTER THAN...

After reading the latest edition of your great mag, I have to ask, is there just the slightest hint of anti-Half-Lifism floating about the *ZONE* office these days, or are you just bored of referring to it constantly every time a new shooter comes along?

I mean first Ritchie S says that if it wasn't for *Counter-Strike* he would have got rid of it ages ago, then Tony Lamb says if it wasn't for *Counter-Strike* and *Team Fortress Classic* gamers would have

forgotten about it years ago. Apart from anything else, forgetting it would be impossible as it is still the benchmark game for the genre, and everything is compared against it.

Are you trying to ween us away gently because you know of a game that's about to blow *Half-Life* off the top spot and smash it to smithereens? After playing some of the more recent offerings I went back and played *HL* again just to see the difference, and it was still great, but I really hope something is about to happen as I think the FPS world needs a kick up the arse at the moment.

J.B.A.

⊙ **Better than *Half-Life*? I wouldn't know what you're talking about. Check out pages 36 and 64.**

NAIL FILE

I enjoyed your feature last issue on how to silence a PC. I was especially taken by the photographs, which showed how easy it was to quieten down a very noisy games machine. What I wanted to know, however, was whose fingers are in the photos? I assume that they belong to Tim Ponting, since he wrote the feature. If so, can you ask him what he uses to keep his fingers in such good shape? And whether he works out?

Martin Ripley

⊙ **They might look nice, but they smell awful apparently.**

EMULATION ZONE

Does *PC ZONE* check all the legal details before it prints the information in its Emulation Zone article? I say this because last issue you talked about emulating the Game Boy Advance, a console that is still on sale. I know there are some iffy loopholes that allow you to own an emulator as long as you use it only for legal ROMs but you guys were talking about emulating *Super Mario* and other titles that are still on sale.

Previously you've talked about arcade machines that

here's the bottom line. Playing, via emulation, software you don't own is illegal. There is NO '24-hour evaluation' rule. There is *no* distinction in law between one-week-old Game Boy Advance games and 20-year-old Spectrum games. If you are playing either of those on your PC without owning the original software, you *are* breaking the law.

The legal aspects of emulation have been covered to death already and we haven't got the space

> **❝I find it shocking that you condemn PC piracy but you feel free to tell your readers how to pirate console games❞**
>
> **SGT_CHIMP ON EMULATING CONSOLE GAMES**

are still in use and other titles that are still being sold for profit. Why don't you just print where your readers can download PC warez and excuse your actions by telling them only to use the full games on a try-before-you-buy basis. I find it totally shocking that in the past you have condemned PC piracy but you feel free to tell your readers how to pirate console games.

sgt_chimp

⊙ OK, it seems like quite a few of you have got strong opinions one way or another on this subject, so

to print this warning each and every issue. Emulation Zone treats its readers like the intelligent grown-ups you are. Nobody's making you use emulators if you don't want to. We just report the news and like it or not, emulation is a vibrant part of the PC gaming scene. Ultimately, it's up to you to make your own moral judgements and take responsibility for your own actions." **PCZ**

⊕ **Emulation – right or wrong – is part of the PC scene and as such we will be covering it every month.**

EMULATION ZONE BULLETIN

EMULATION ZONE

STUART CAMPBELL REPORTS FROM A WORLD WHERE NO PLATFORM IS OUT OF REACH

VISUAL PINBALL TABLE OF THE MONTH

Tom Clancy's

GHOST RECON ™

M4 Assault Carbine :
Length: 39.63 inches (100.66 centimeters)
Weight (empty): 5.6 pounds (2.54 kilograms)
Bore diameter: 5.56mm (.233 inches)
Muzzle velocity: 2,900 feet (584 meters) per second
Rate of fire: 700-1000 rds/min
Magazine capacity: 20 or 30 rounds

- **Next-generation military technology,** use of the newest infantry gear and weaponry such as the OICW for lethal combat and strikes.

- **Realistic infantry combat model** based on the US special forces from Force Delta with up to 600 motion captured movements.

- **Enhanced control and planning methods** of your squad of elite soldiers for more quick thinking strategy and fast paced action.

- **Reward experience points** for your soldiers to improve skills such as Endurance, Leadership, Weapon and Stealth.

- **Deadly multi-player games with up to 36 opponents** with death match and co-operative modes.

Finished... at last

RETURN TO CASTLE
WOLFENSTEIN

One of the Nazies most ingenious weapons. Well, would you shoot her?

When we were told someone could go to America to look at a completed *Wolfenstein*, *Steve Hill* volunteered himself – well, he would wouldn't he?

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Gray Matter
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.activision.com/games/wolfenstein
OUT "Before Christmas"

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

✪ Revisiting of the game that pioneered the FPS genre
✪ Unhampered by historical authenticity
✪ Fantastical storyline
✪ Stunning graphics
✪ It's finished

If a week is a long time in politics, then what price a decade in gaming? Such are the advances in technology that it's probably akin to a century in other forms of entertainment. Ten long years ago, during the Cro-Magnon age of games, a series of pixels crawled from the primordial soup and hauled itself to its feet. A new species was born that was dubbed by scientists as the first-person shooter. That game was of course *Wolfenstein 3D*, which in turn begat *Doom* which begat *Quake* that begat the audio-visual extravaganzas we know today.

So what are we doing returning to the castle, and how is it looking these days? Unrecognisable, clearly. Using a modified version of the *Quake III Arena* engine, developer Gray Matter has fashioned an impressive looking game, the project taking place under the watchful eye of id software, owners of both the technology and the license.

GAMES WILL EAT THEMSELVES

It could be argued that *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* signals the first-person genre coming full circle, particularly in light of the forthcoming *Doom* game. It could also be suggested that the rehashing of the past represents a dearth of ideas. And if you want to start rubbing your chin, you could even draw parallels with Tim Burton's *Planet Of The Apes*, a pseudo remake that was loftily described as a re-imagining of the original vision. Or is it simply an opportunity to use today's technology on yesterday's games? What do we know? Let's ask id CEO, Todd Hollenshead. Hey Todd, has the industry run out if ideas?

"Ha, ha, ha. Well first of all, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* isn't a remake, it actually is a new game that's in the Wolfenstein era. I mean, what you're able to do from a technology standpoint today, there's no comparison to the movie aspect of it. *Wolfenstein 3D* was a simple game, simple and fun, and I think *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* in terms of comparison to the original one, in terms of depth of the game, there is really no comparison at all."

What there is a comparison with is *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, at least in so much as both are forthcoming World War II first-person shooters. That's where the similarity ends though, as while Spielberg's emphatic eye for authenticity has heavily informed *MOH*, the new *Wolfenstein* resolutely remains a work of fantasy. It's not so much historical revisionism as the stuff of a madman's dream. That madman is Nazi general, Heimlich Himmler, and he's opened up a whole can of worms.

IT WAS A DARK KNIGHT...

It's hard to know where to start with a plot like this. Let's try the ninth century, where the pre-Christian Saxon prince Heinrich sought to forge an independent Germanic state by rising up a vast army of the evil undead, led by the Dark Knights, no less. A nasty piece of work, Heinrich was finally foiled by a mysterious monk in 943 AD, and enshrined in a

living tomb on top of a remote mountain peak. Fast forward 1,000 years, and Himmler is looking into the possibility of raising him from the dead and commanding his army of zombies against the Allies.

It's not a documentary by any means, as Hollenshead explains: "Although every single element in the game may be over the top, based on the research we've done, and the Gray Matter guys have done, a lot of this stuff is actually based on crazy stuff that was going on. In fact, there's a History Channel videocassette we have in our archives at the office that is titled *Hitler And The Occult*, and we have a four videocassette series that is titled *The Occult History Of The Third Reich*. So a lot of the elements, the Teutonic Knights and all these sorts of things, these guys actually believed in. Now, were they re-animating corpses?"

KILLING NAZI PUNKS

It seems unlikely, but either way, you once more assume the role of BJ Blazkowicz, an Allied super-soldier charged with the task of saving the world. So let's do just that with an extended playtest of the finished code, sealed deep in a bunker inside id's

Q&A

TODD HOLLENSHEAD

The CEO of id software comes under the ZONE *grill*

PCZ The Nazis obviously did some pretty twisted stuff, but fire-breathing zombies?
TODD *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is a comic book take on the story of Hitler and Nazi Germany. We're definitely going for WWII meets *The X-Files*, a lot of mystery elements and supernatural and occult and all those sorts of things that were present in *Wolfenstein 3D*.
PCZ How do you think it's going to do in Germany?
TODD Germany is always an issue for us because they always want to ban our games. But we expect it will have a version that won't be illegal in Germany because of the Nazi iconography, because we can substitute some of the art assets out. Things that are considered to be culturally offensive such as the swastikas are basically removed from the game, although, of course, that's not our intent with the game at all, it's not an endorsement of the Nazi party at all, if anything it's poking fun at the over-the-top aspect of the über-Nazis.
PCZ How careful do you have to be? Do you think anyone could possibly be offended by it?
TODD If your objective is not to offend anyone and that's what you make your primary goal, you're going to ultimately end up coming out with something that's going to be boring and have no soul. So I think that you just have to recognise that some people will be offended and they have a right to have a different opinion, but our standpoint on it is you're fighting Nazis, they're the evil side. It goes all the way back to the *Doom* stuff when people said "All the demons in *Doom* must mean you guys worship Satan." It's like, no, you actually fought the demons.
PCZ Gray Matter has a reputation for sick games. *Redneck Rampage, Kingpin...*
TODD We're not trying to offend anybody with *Wolfenstein*. I know some artists, and not just games developers, it goes for music, movies and literature as well, I believe they use shock value to get their point across. *Wolfenstein* from that standpoint is much more of a WWII movie-esque take on the whole violence aspect of it. You don't have any dismemberment of the characters, it's not like the *Soldier Of Fortune 2* stuff where you can pump lead into corpses and sever arms and stuff like that.

The wife should be pleased, I'll take it home for sunday lunch.
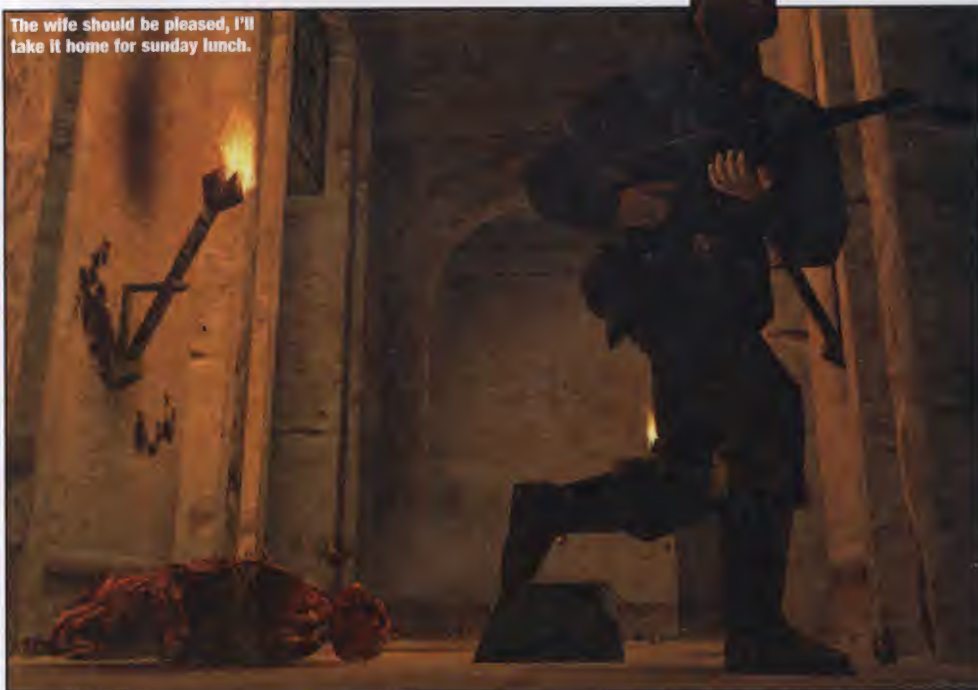
headquarters in the US of A. Regaining consciousness deep within the bowels of the castle, the first thought is to get the hell out of there; *Escape From Castle Wolfenstein*, if you like. This becomes all the more pressing when you are witness to a macabre experiment being carried out on one of your

"It's possible to attempt the game using stealth, but it's more enjoyable to adopt a gung-ho approach and burst into rooms with machine gun blazing"

colleagues. About now is a good time to start slaughtering Nazis, and there are a number of ways you can do this, be it slitting their throats with a knife or shooting them squarely between the eyes with a gun. The weaponry on offer is a mix of the actual and the theoretical, and among the usual FPS fare are treats such as the flamethrower, as popularised in *Kingpin* from the same developer. As for gore, there is the odd drop of blood, but it is fairly tame compared to more gratuitous examples of the genre.

It is possible to attempt the game using stealth, but it's clearly more enjoyable to adopt a gung-ho approach and burst into rooms with machine gun blazing. This choice of styles is perfectly demonstrated by something as simple as opening a door. The orthodox method is to open it in the time-honoured fashion, using the handle. However, if you're in a hurry, you can simply give it a kick, speeding up your egress, albeit with the pay-off of being more likely to alert the guards. And while we're at it, we should mention that the doors open both ways, a miracle of German engineering.

LAY A CABLE

The flexibility of the *Quake III* engine is ably demonstrated, with the ability to lean round corners proving useful, although you can't actually shoot while leaning. Faces are reasonably detailed, and nice touches such as cobwebs add to the atmosphere. Outdoor environments are tossed around with gay abandon, particularly once you get out of the castle, with a cable car sequence in

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

That was then and this is now

Although graphically and in terms of gameplay, the new *Wolfenstein* is light years ahead of its predecessor, certain touches remain as a homage to the original. For instance, numerous tasteful portraits of Adolf Hitler adorn the walls, suits of armour regularly crop up, and as in the first game, the words "Get psyched!" for some reason precede each mission. *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* also features a number of secret areas, many stacked with Nazi gold. Unfortunately you can't spend it.

How it was...

...and how it is now.
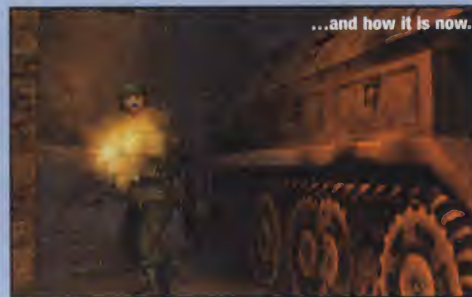
Nazi but nice.

Some planes.

Positively shocking.

"Hang on love, you've dropped your handbag."

Pest control at Europe's leading hot spot.

GRAY MATTER

Technically this is its first game, although under the previous name of Xatrix it was responsible for this lot

1999 *Kingpin: Life Of Crime* Controversy knocks with this gangster 'em up that became renowned largely for the foul and abusive language and gratuitous violence.

1997 *Redneck Rampage* Slack-jawed yokels, alien abduction and trailer parks made this a benchmark in bad taste. *Redneck Deer Huntin'* Bizarre sports game spin-off. *Redneck Rampage Rides Again Arkansas* Come on lads, that's enough. *Quake II Mission Pack The Reckoning.* Reckoned to be among the best.

1994 *Cyberia* Unexceptional shooter on rails. *Cyberia 2 Ressurection:* More of the same.

particular almost causing vertigo. As for gameplay, while not exactly breaking the mould of shoot the enemy, press the button, it kicks along at a fair old pace. You can't simply shoot anything that moves though, as injuring a civilian can bring a mission to a close.

The plot is advanced with numerous cut scenes, and takes you through a variety of disparate locations, lurching from the claustrophobic catacombs of Heinrich's tomb to wide open spaces such as a fully functioning airfield. The twists and turns of the story are enough to keep you playing for hours, simply to see what happens, the experience made all the more enjoyable by the opportunity to mete out severe punishment to Nazis and their undead brethren.

As a single-player game, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is an absorbing experience, and will be meat and drink to FPS veterans raised on the 'defeat the boss, complete the level' ethos. World War II games may be all the rage at the moment, but not many can boast authentic enemies fighting alongside the results of supernatural experimentation. *Saving Private Ryan* it isn't, but it is a right old laugh, and very scary to boot.

MATES ROUND

As for the multiplayer aspect, we've dabbled with a few more levels, and it's definitely more of a military simulation than the single player game. Opting to fight for either the Axis or the Allies, various classes are available such as soldier, lieutenant and engineer. There are clear objectives to achieve, and those we attempted included blowing up a submarine and breaching a beach wall, each requiring a reasonable degree of teamwork and strategy. None of your DeathMatch or Capture The Flag here.

That's pretty much your *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, and having recently replayed the original we have to concede the ten-year interim has brought about a marked improvement. We're not going to go mad on the basis of a five-hour play though, and won't be giving you a full review until we have played through the entire game. Suffice to say though, the first-person shooter genre is about to get a shot in the arm, and we have a very strong hunch there could soon be a new entry at the top of the Shooters Top Ten. Happy Christmas (or so they have promised). PCZ

Feel the need to...

BREED

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Brat Designs
PUBLISHER CDV
WEBSITE www.brat-designs.com
OUT Q3 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Could steal *Halo*'s thunder
- Realistic and individual physics for each vehicle
- Superb teamplay options
- Huge replayability factors
- Stunning graphics engine

BRAT DESIGNS

Brat have a long and distinguished list of games to their name, mainly on other platforms though, such as the PSX, C64 and Gameboy Colour. To date, their only PC games have been...

1998 *Shadowman* – A solid and occasionally surprising third-person action adventure.

1997 *Batman Forever* – Rubbish arcade beat 'em up.

Martin Korda **gets wooed by CDV's futuristic shooter**

Those of you who attended will probably agree that this year's ECTS was somewhat of a letdown. However, amidst the mire of games on show and the greasy-haired parasitic journalists sponging off obliging PR people, there were the occasional glimmers of inspiration. CDV's exciting and meteoric rise to prominence continued as they picked up the Game of the Show award for their sublime-looking action/strategy game, *Nomads*. However, that wasn't the only title that pulled our straying eyes away from the scantily clad, buxom lovelies who were desperately trying to stir up excitement about games destined to score in single figures. Huh, as if we'd be so shallow as to fall for a cheap stunt like that, although after speaking to a six-foot, surgically enhanced blonde, we can officially say that *Erotica Island 2* looks like it's going to be one of the best games of all time.

However, the game that caught my eye the most had nothing to do with flesh and debauchery unfortunately (although a quick glance at the title could make you think otherwise). *Breed*, now ten months away from completion, is looking like it's shaping up to be one of the shooters to keep an eye on next year. And, after countless exuberant cries to see more, we were granted an audience with several members of the Brat development team.

PLOTTING A REVOLUTION

Let's start with the basics and have a quick squiz at the storyline. It all starts on a battle cruiser called Darwin that is returning from the outer colonies to discover that Earth has been overrun by an alien force called the Breed, which has subjugated humanity. However, a group of guerrillas (possibly descendants of Pete Sampras, or is that gorillas?) are out to stop them, who you promptly join on your return.

At a quick glance, *Breed* bares more than a passing resemblance to Microsoft's Xbox flagship title *Halo*. I asked one of the team whether they saw *Breed* as direct competition to the inevitable PC conversion. "Obviously there are a number of similarities, I think we both share similar influences. Due to its Xbox origins, *Halo* will undoubtedly be a more console-

> **One person can fire laser-guided rockets while someone else can designate a target**

orientated experience. We're aiming for something more realistic, like a cross between *Quake* and *Delta Force*." Well that's cleared that up then.

KNOW YOUR ROLE

Breed will let you drive a number of vehicles, including flying ships into combat in Earth's orbit. And Brat are keen to point out that there'll be a seamless transition between Earth and space, while ground-based missions will be set over several continents, such as Australasia and North America.

If everything goes to plan they're hoping to produce a whopping 24 missions to shoot and think your way through and, as Brat were quick to point out: "Each one of these can be tackled from a variety of different perspectives. For example, you may want to play as one of the troops on the ground, using laser designators to mark targets, or you might want to control the fighter whose mission it is to bomb the designated targets. This will provide a lot of replayability in the single-player game." Let's hope they can pull it off.

But playing from different perspectives is all very well and good, though ultimately pointless if your only goal is to kill as many of the enemy as possible in a mindless frag-fest. Brat are quick to point out that this definitely won't be the case: "There'll be assault missions, rescue missions, missions where stealth is of the essence. Many times you'll be

100

2 3 2 M-22 Assault Rifle 4

Go on, I dare you.
Spit on his head.

At least the aliens have marked the toilets clearly.

Just one of the many vehicles you'll get to drive.

acting to assist the resistance. For example, in one mission, the resistance is trying to evacuate a large number of humans from the planet using transports that they have managed to get working. In this mission, it is your task to hold off the attacking *Breed* forces and then escort the transports off the planet."

Which led us onto the subject of the game's other vehicles. Having already had a go on a buggy – both as the driver, the gunner and a fighter – I was keen to find out what other contraptions will be available. Apparently you'll also get to pilot tanks, APCs and dropships, each of which will have individual and realistic physics, and hold multiple troops. "For example, the engines on the dropship have their thrust accurately modelled. You can toggle them between horizontal and vertical thrust. In horizontal thrust mode it acts like a plane, while in vertical thrust mode it behaves more like a helicopter.

"If you're carrying a heavy load it will handle sluggishly, and if one of the engines is destroyed, because of the realistic physics, the dropship will become unstable and the player will be forced to crash-land or eject. We're very pleased with the gameplay elements that emerge from the realism." The mood is enthusiastic, and broad and confident smiles break out over the rest of the team's faces.

FRIENDLY FIRE
So how about weapons? "There'll be the usual rocket launchers, sniper rifles and so on. The cool thing about the rockets is that you can select laser-guided ordnance. You also have a laser designator, so you can have one person with a launcher firing laser-guided rockets and someone else designating a target. You'll also be able to get your hands on the *Breed* weapons, which will be more exotic, but we'd like to keep them under wraps for the time being." And what have they got to say for themselves in terms of the multiplayer side of the action? "There will be the usual deathmatch, capture the flag and so on. We'll be creating multiplayer-only maps, and you'll also be able to play the single-player missions co-operatively or as the Breed. Many of the vehicles can be utilised by two or more players at the same time." It almost sounds too good to be true, but from what we've seen of the game so far, and the confidence Brat have in their own ability, it all points to *Breed* being potentially one of the hottest shooters of next year. Rest assured, we'll keep you posted. 🎮
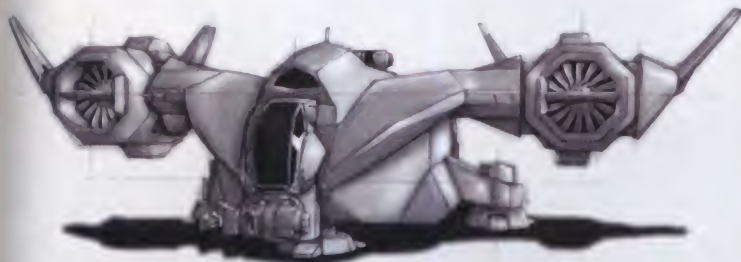
Sun, sand, but no sex. And this game is called *Breed*, why?

AI AI, WHAT'S ALL THIS THEN?

Intelligence is out there, somewhere...

There isn't too much in terms of AI in the build I played, so I asked designer Jason Gee to reveal what the team had planned in terms of enemy behaviour. "Because the Breed are alien, we are not restricted in the way that we make them behave," he said. "The Breed vision will be sensitive to movement, so at a distance the Breed will not detect a stationary target. This will introduce some interesting possibilities for stealth. The Breed also have a defence network, so if a sensor detects the player, it will communicate the position to other Breed forces that are part of the network. This could bring attacks from ground or air forces or long-range weaponry. It will therefore become vital for the player to disrupt the Breed's communications and keep his forces on the move.

Look out behind you. The Breed are coming.
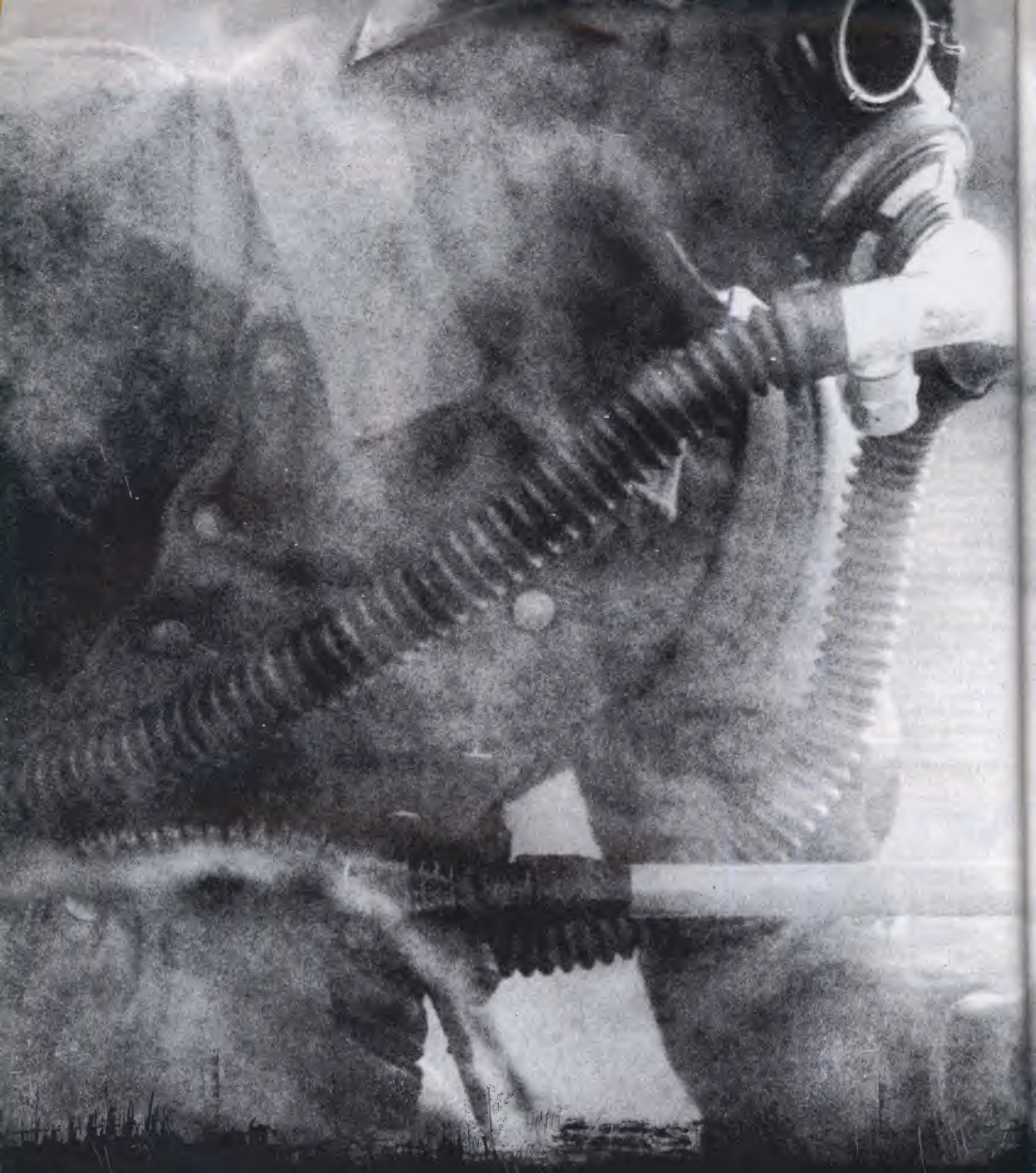
The Blitzkrieg begins this Christmas.

id Software's deadliest legend has a terrifying secret to reveal.
This Christmas prepare to return to Castle Wolfenstein.

RETURN TO CASTLE

Wolfenstein™

The fighting heads East with
BATTLE REALMS

Real-time strategy with an oriental twist? Sounds like a job for *Chris Anderson*

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Liquid Entertainment (funded by Crave)
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft
WEBSITE www.battlerealms.com
OUT Q4 2001

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Traditional real-time strategy with stunning visuals.
- Oriental theme takes *Battle Realms* off the beaten track.
- Limited units give you better control over big battles.
- Allows you to use terrain and real line-of-sight for surprise attacks.

LIQUID ENTERTAINMENT

Battle Realms is Liquid Entertainment's first contribution to the PC games market. Formed in 1999 and funded by Crave, they began work on *Battle Realms* upon forming a team of people with proven success in the industry. If *Battle Realms* is any indication of their talent, they have a bright future to look forward to.

We have to admit, with the constant flood of real-time strategy games on to the market it's becoming increasingly difficult to make one that stands out from the crowd. Developer Liquid Entertainment has nonetheless taken up the challenge and is working on a game where the gameplay may well be very familiar to fans of the genre, but the setting is very different. Forget military and fantasy units and characters, *Battle Realms* is taking the genre off the beaten track with the introduction of oriental settings and characters. This has been done before with varying degrees of success. *Three Kingdoms* had an oriental offshoot that never really took off, *Throne Of Darkness* has a distinctly oriental flavour but veered more towards *Diablo* than *Age Of Empires*, and *Shogun* had an oriental theme and was hugely successful but it relied more on strategy than resource management. *Battle Realms* then, appears to be working with tried and tested elements of resource management and real-time action, but Liquid is hoping its fairly unique presentation will appeal to fans of the genre who are tired of playing with the same units and buildings in umpteen RTS releases month after month. Fortunately for us, we don't have to guess at how things are developing with this title. We've played it.

Attack enemy buildings and raze them to the ground.

The Lotus Clan finally get what's coming to them.

HANDS ON

The beta we played was reasonably stable, so we managed to progress a fair distance into the game. The first thing we noticed was the attention to graphic detail. *Battle Realms* is nothing short of stunning in visual terms. Crisp and colourful with wonderful animations, this title will surely be turning heads everywhere upon its release. Story sequences are also beautifully presented using the in-game engine, and many key events trigger short cut-scenes that develop the story and teach the player how to play the game. A short tutorial is all that's needed to get up and running with your new village, and once you've sent your peasants off to get rice and water, you can start producing fighting units to go hunt down the enemy. In terms of gameplay, it has to be said that first impressions suggest *Battle Realms* does not veer wildly from the norm. Build a settlement with all the buildings and resources you need, then amass an army, which is hopefully bigger than your opponent's, and get involved in conflicts of suitably big proportions. However, the units you will be commanding, and their abilities, are far from what you will perhaps be used to in other games of

this type. Dragon, Serpent, Lotus and Wolf Clans make up the opposing factions in the game, and they each have their own versions of archers, spearmen, warriors and geisha with abilities distinct to their clan.

BETTER, NOT BIGGER

Where *Battle Realms* moves slightly away from traditional RTS strategies is in its use of horses. In *Battle Realms*, horses are not just units that are magically 'glued' to your units and follow them everywhere they go. Your peasants need to round them up and take them to your stables, where they can be used by your units to increase travel speed, scout enemy areas, and provide a distinct advantage in battle

> **"A short tutorial is all that's needed to get up and running with your new village"**

when used by attacking units. Liquid says there will be no huge battles, but rather smaller conflicts where players will find themselves thinking more about use of terrain, rather than just wading into battle with as many units as possible. On the evidence of what we've seen so far, it's certainly true that there are no battles involving huge armies, but that doesn't make the battles any less hectic or exciting. Real line of sight and the ability to use trees, hills, forests and even height of terrain to your advantage suggest battles will be more a test of your strategic prowess than your ability to build lots of things as quickly as possible and run off looking for trouble, although, there is a fair amount of that, too. *Battle Realms* is shaping up to be a real contender in the RTS genre. It's certainly the best-looking of the bunch so far. Whether it will live up to its potential in terms of gameplay is a matter for discussion in our full review next month. PCZ

It's them, the enemy, that lot, kill them.

HOW MANY HAVE YOU GOT?

Truly original or just another RTS?

While *Battle Realms* appears to offer many innovations, it can still be played in the same way as all the other RTS games out there if you choose: build as big an army as you can and rush your opponent in the hope he hasn't had the time to 'outbuild' you. We spent much of our time in the beta making spearmen and archers in great numbers, sending peasants out to round up horses, and sending our considerable mobile army into battle. Later levels offer healers in the form of the geisha, and chemists can inflict area effect magical damage, so the potential for different strategies is there. It's nothing we haven't seen before. Read next month's review, which will be based on the later part of the game for a proper observation of how the game plays and whether or not its claims of true originality are actually realised.

Replica or original?

When the territorial map screen appears, you have limited choices as to where you can go.

As in your father's time, the Wolf barbarians are woefully unprepared to face a battle-ready foe.

A small band of spearmen bite off more than they can chew.
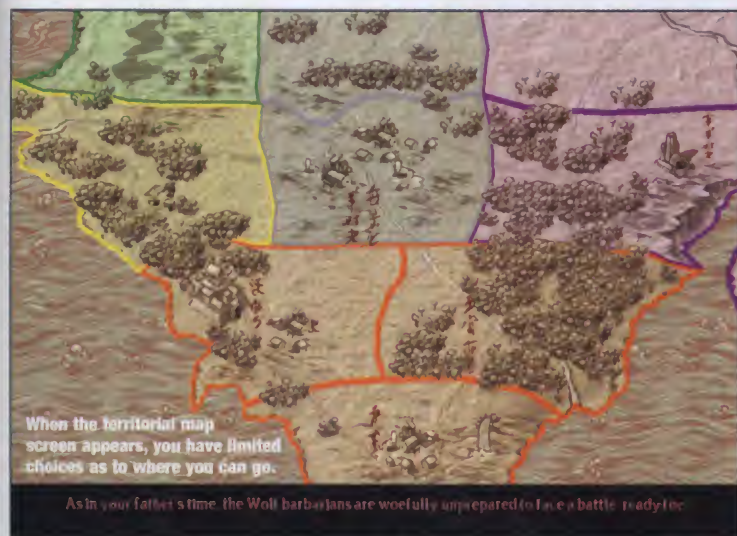
The *Quake III Arena* engine is being used to impressive effect.

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AUTO

Travel the world, meet people, kill them...
SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 2:
DOUBLE HELIX

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Raven Software
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.activision.com/games/
soldieroffortune/doublehelix.asp
OUT Early 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Sequel to one of the most violent games ever made
- Tackle terrorism on a global scale
- Story involving biological warfare
- Nothing controversial there then

Steve Hill **may not be a soldier, but he is rumoured to be worth a fortune**

The original *Soldier Of Fortune* may have appalled and disgusted due to its graphic portrayal of bodily mutilation, but that was back in a more innocent age. Since the events of September 11, the goalposts have moved, perhaps irreversibly, and releasing a game involving terrorism is virtually asking for outraged headlines, particularly when the plot involves the threat of biological warfare. Clearly something of a political hot potato, development on *Soldier Of Fortune 2* is nevertheless carrying on regardless, and at this stage it is unlikely to be changed into a game in which bouquets of flowers are handed out to the nasty men.

It would be irresponsible of us to ignore the issue though, and during a demonstration of the game we spoke at length to Raven Software's project administrator, Kenn Hoekstra. He claimed: "There's been a lot of sensitivity to the issue and a lot of people trying to make judgments about what the American public can handle and what they can't. I think what it comes down to, if you want to talk about freedom of choice, is that people can choose to entertain themselves however they want. They can watch what they want to watch, do what they want to do, and we're not going to try to make that judgment for people. This game has been in development for two years and we're

sticking to our development philosophy and our design and just trying to make the best game we can."

CHEMICAL WARFARE

That game will again feature real-life Vietnam veteran John Mullins, who has recently spent some time at the Raven office in his capacity as mercenary consultant. The story begins with a prelude mission that takes place 15 years ago, when Mullins was sent into a Soviet complex in Prague to extract a biological weapons

no passengers. The idea is that it actually belongs to the terrorists, who are now being pitched as some kind of James Bond-style SPECTRE outfit intent on world domination. Perhaps wisely, there will be no reappearance of the Middle Eastern level. As Hoekstra says: "Actually I think one of the things we got flak about in the original game was the Middle Eastern connection. Out of respect for not trying to classify everyone as a terrorist, we opted for the more kind of SPECTRE-esque, taking over the world idea."

> **"A password system will enable you to lock out aspects of the game, such as blood or dismemberment"**

scientist. Back in the present day, and the virus that the scientist was working on shows up in Colombia. It's another excuse for Mullins to grab his passport, and off he sets on a globe-trotting odyssey of slaughter and pain that takes in such exotic locations as an ocean liner en route to Tampa Bay, a Hong Kong prison, and a top secret underground complex in Kamchatka, wherever that is.

There is even a level set on an aeroplane in flight, which we really had to question. Hoekstra was keen to stress that the plane had not been hijacked, and even gave us a tour around it to confirm that there were

SECOND TIME AROUND

It's certainly an elaborate tale, and Hoekstra admits: "We tried to focus a lot more on the story this time around. In the last game the story was an afterthought and this time we planned it from the beginning. You kind of unravel the mystery of what's going on – I know that's in increased demand in FPS games."

Also in demand is decent AI, which is one of the criticisms of the first *Soldier Of Fortune*. This time around, Raven is implementing different levels of AI, with trained enemies working in a more tactical manner. Conversely, so-called thug AI will be used for

Different firing modes can help you conserve ammunition, a bit like *Gunman Chronicles*.

There's no multiplayer planned at the moment, but the game will feature a random mission generator.

MULTIPLE MISSION MADNESS

You want infinite missions? You got 'em

Unusually for a first-person shooter, *Soldier Of Fortune 2* will not feature multiplayer action, the official line being that this is now almost a genre in itself and that simply adding a few half-arsed Deathmatch levels would not be doing it justice.

However, a huge amount of value is to be added by the inclusion of a random scenario generator. Essentially this will work in the same way as random maps in real-time strategy

games, with variables selected such as what enemies you want to fight and what environment and terrain you want to employ.

And if infinite random missions aren't enough, you can even design your own, by placing buildings and so forth, and deciding objectives such as rescuing hostages, meeting a contact or straightforward seek and destroy. Sounds like a treat for all budding game designers.

The weapons are all authentic, and are even localised depending on what part of the world you're in.

more basic foes, such as Hong Kong street gangs.

Whoever you're fighting, there is still plenty of scope for doing damage, and we were given a graphic demonstration of a blood-drenched corpse being shot repeatedly in the eye. Other visceral treats included bones sticking out from the still warm flesh of your enemies. However, if this isn't your bag, a password system is being implemented enabling you to lock out specific aspects of the game, such as blood or dismemberment, effectively letting you tailor the violence to a level you deem suitable. Or you could just play something else.

At the end of the day, *Soldier Of Fortune* has always been about running around shooting people in the face, and the sequel will still offer this. But as Hoekstra says: "We've tried to remain true to the original gameplay as far as action goes, but we've also tried to put in more stealth elements and multiple ways for you to complete missions. You can run and gun and shoot everything that moves or you can try to be stealthy and avoid security cameras."

What Raven, and by association, Activision, won't be able to avoid is the inevitable criticism that the game will receive when it hits shelves next year.

The US games industry has a reputation for being extremely violent as it is, and this can only help to reinforce that. But as Hoekstra admits: "The timing is unfortunate but it's fundamentally trying to give people entertainment. We're not making a political statement." **PCZ**

CV **RAVEN** S·O·F·T·W·A·R·E

RAVEN SOFTWARE

They've been at the first-person shooter game a while, this Raven lot. Here are a few you may have heard of. They're also working on *Quake IV* and *Jedi Knight 2*.

2000	*Soldier Of Fortune*: Ban this sick filth. *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force*: Fairly hard-going for non-*Trek* gimps.
1998	*Heretic II*: The series was getting tired by this point, with much more of the same.
1997	*Hexen II*: Based on the *QII* engine you had to find a cure for a plague.
1995	*Hexen*: The first sequel to *Heretic*.
1994	*Heretic*: First-person shooter based in a warped medieval dimension. *Cyclones*: Overlooked early FPS that allowed you look up and down.

Look to the light

DIVINE DIVINITY

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Larian Studios
PUBLISHER CDV
WEBSITE www.divinedivinity.com
OUT Q1 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- A cool interactive world where many objects can be picked up and used
- Huge level of in-game detail
- Beautiful 1024x768 resolution
- Four CDs worth of world to explore
- Advanced AI

LARIAN STUDIOS

Larian Studios was founded in 1996 in Flanders, Belgium.

1996 Larian starts work on *LMK* (*The Lady, The Mage And The Knight*)

1997 *LED Wars* is made in five months - released by a US publisher Ionos (now bankrupt), *LMK* is signed by Attic Entertainment of Germany.

1998 Attic runs out of funding for *LMK* and Larian waves their goodbyes.

1999 *LMK* is cancelled and Larian focus on creating all kinds of multimedia gigs to bring money. Slowly *LMK* is reborn.

2000 *LMK* is progressing well. Larian starts to look for a publisher and at ECTS 2000 it attracts the attention of CDV.

2001 Larian sign with CDV and *LMK* is renamed *Divine Divinity*.

Rhianna Pratchett **searches for the remote control, loose change and her house keys… oh and the divine within herself**

What do you love about RPGs? Is it the longevity of the *Baldur's Gate* series, the fantastic storyline of something like *Planescape: Torment*, the immense playability of *Diablo* or the fact that sometimes your loved ones have to get out the hose to remove you from games such as *Ultima 3D* and *EverQuest*? Now think about what you hate about them. It might be the fact that they often don't let you do what you like, that you can't interact with the scenery, that you can't smash a chair over that annoying chubby bartender's head. Maybe it's because they can be all about just grabbing the biggest, hardest looking weapon you can find, and clicking as fast as you can on an enemy with about as much AI as a cheese sandwich.

There's no doubt that RPGs over the last few years have been dominated by the same handful of developers namely Blizzard, Black Isle, Verrant and Origin. If you're an RPG fan, your opinion about what makes a good RPG and what makes a bad one, will inevitably have been shaped in part by the performance of the above developer's games. Yes we have loved them, be it a long tumultuous love affair or a quick

fling. But now we're left with a genre that's starting to look a bit grey around the edges, a little bit saggy perhaps, not so lithe and nubile as it once was and our eyes are starting to stray. *Throne Of Darkness* has already wiggled provocatively onto our screens and given the RPG hack 'n' slash a much-needed lift in the strategy department, and now it's the turn of *Divine Divinity* to be the Viagra to the flaccidity of RPGs.

FREEDOM TO EXPLORE

"Ever since *Ultima 7* and probably *Ultima Underworld*, I've missed the feeling that exploring a RPG is actually worth it," claims Swen Vincke *Divine Divinity's* producer and founder, coder, designer and self-admitted chief sucker of the game's developer, Larian Studios. "I mean, sure, you can find items here and there if you deviate from your path in modern day RPGs, and you can occasionally run into a lone NPC, but not to the extent it was done in those games. That's something we've tried to bring back with *Divinity*. There's a huge amount of things to discover. The engine allows the player a large amount of freedom, and this has been giving the story guys a tremendous headache over the past 10 months."

In many respects the world and storyline surrounding *Divine Divinity*, is standard hardcore RPG fare. A troubled lead

SWEN VINCKE
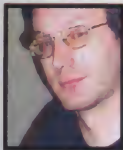
We held down and prodded Divine Divinity*'s producer for a bit more information on the birth of his baby and the future of RPGs*

PCZ Where have you drawn your influences for *Divine Divinity* from?

SWEN For everything that's not user interface or combat related, that would be *Ultima 7* (both parts). For the rest, a bit from everywhere I guess, though *Diablo* obviously was a big inspiration when it came to user interface simplicity.

PCZ RPG fans can often be divided into *Baldur's Gate* and *Diablo* camps, what will *Divine Divinity* offer them?

SWEN They should both find something that is addictive to them. You can play the entire game through in a hack 'n' slash fashion with a minimum amount of NPC interaction, but you can also go through the entire game with a minimum amount of combat, fulfilling tons of quests and discovering plenty of things. It's one of the implications of trying to offer as much freedom as possible. Much to the dislike of the story team.

PCZ Why have you decided to omit multiplayer and is this going to be added at a later date?

SWEN It was planned, but we just couldn't pay the additional people and infrastructure we would need to put multiplayer in. We all hope *DivDiv* will do so well that we'll be bulking with cash so we can subsequently waste it on putting the multiplayer in. The game definitely deserves multiplayer.

PCZ How do you think RPGs will need to evolve in the future?

SWEN In general, I think they will evolve in the direction almost all games are bound to evolve. There will always be more and more freedom, and there will always be more and more immersion (on all fronts) until at some point the escape from reality will be so convincing you won't be able to differentiate anymore. It'll all be multiplayer too I guess, because I can't see AI getting good enough in the near future to pass a gamers Turing test.

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character, unknowingly possessed by one third of a divine being (well if you will wander the woods alone) must travel a long path to discover the divine powers within themselves and rise up against the forces of evil. You can play as one of six characters – male or female barbarian, male or female mage or male and female adventurers – each with their own strengths, weaknesses and special moves. Plus there is the usual stats and spell system, which is simple and easy to navigate. But it is the sense of exploration and interaction within the game, mentioned by Vincke, that ➔

Flame grilled knights are preferable to raw ones.
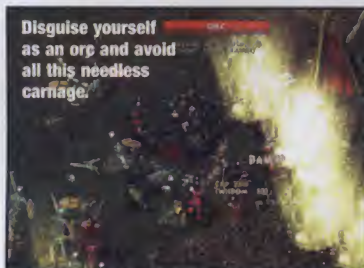
Disguise yourself as an orc and avoid all this needless carnage.

You're a girl alone, surrounded by vicious imps, aren't you glad you packed the big sword?

Definate shades of *Ultima Third Dawn*.

Stay away from the light.

There's no shortage of flashy spells and pretty lights in *Divine Divinity*.

This is no normal cat.

is probably the most innovative feature of *Divine Divinity*.

No matter how great an RPG looks, there's always been a rule that you can look but you can't touch. For all the good looks of some of the *Baldur's Gate II* settings you couldn't do much more with the environment than raid a few barrels and chests. Even with the occasional fun of twisting a knob or finding a secret compartment, it could hardly be called interactive.

AN EASY PICK UP

In the world of *Divinity* many of the objects you see can be picked up and used. Table legs, kitchen knives, even garden rakes can be used as weapons, and if you're in a tight spot, a carefully aimed boulder can get you out of trouble. Candles can be lit and snuffed out for situations that demand extreme stealth, and food can be stolen or hunted down. More importantly, as you progress you can acquire knowledge that will help you identify local plant life and enable you to mix potions. The possibilities are endless. "I find it idiotic that usually you can see objects on your screen and you can't do anything with them," says Vincke. "This is something we also tried to address. Not that the player has to interact with all those objects, we just give the option."

This sense of interaction looks set to create an absorbing world, and the developers have gone to great pains to implement an unprecedented level of detail to show off the beautiful 1024x768 resolution and create a world players can truly shape. Butterflies and birds fly over your head, rabbits scamper across your path (you can kill them if you catch them) while all the in-game characters potter about their daily business. There's also been a lot of work gone into creating realistic sounds, for example just running my character across about seven inches of actual game screen, I achieved no less than four sound effects: wet grass, hard mud, stone and normal grass. Now that is attention to detail.

There's also a great deal to look forward to in other departments as well, if Larian Studios delivers on its promises. The AI, it claims, will be so

scouting terrains and infiltrating enemy areas. "Finally, I think the end result of *Divinity* will be an RPG that blends two styles, hard-core RPG and hack and slash action, making it accessible and very deep. But it's important to stress, that it only goes as deep as the player wants," says Vincke.

> **"As you progress you can acquire knowledge that will help you identify local plant life and enable you to mix potions. The possibilities are endless"**

advanced NPCs will have a more realistic attitude towards you based on how you treat them, monsters will react more intelligently in a fight and also come looking for you if they see you've disturbed their area, or even lead you into an ambush. The spell system also looks like fun, particularly the spells that allow you to shift into the body of other creatures, be it a bee, rabbit or orc, which is great for

OK, so it may have a daft title, and yes it's being created by a relatively unknown developer, but *Divine Divinity* looks like it is shaping up to be a surprising treat for RPG fans, a world that you can play with, rather than just play across. Here's hoping Larian Studios does become a David in a world of Goliaths, because that's what we have needed for quite some time.

Female barbarians tend to over-react when the locals run out of soya milk.

It's a lonely life on the path of the divine so sometimes you're joined by a friend
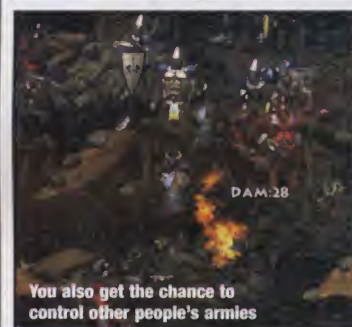
You also get the chance to control other people's armies

And bend and stretch, and bend and KILL, and bend and...

Evil just loves the hooded look.

Weapons and armour carry good and bad points.

Muscly, long-haired barbarians are popular in Belgium.

↑ Arranging effective formations for your fleet is dead simple.

↑ Ground combat, sans graphics, avec rising and diminishing numbers.
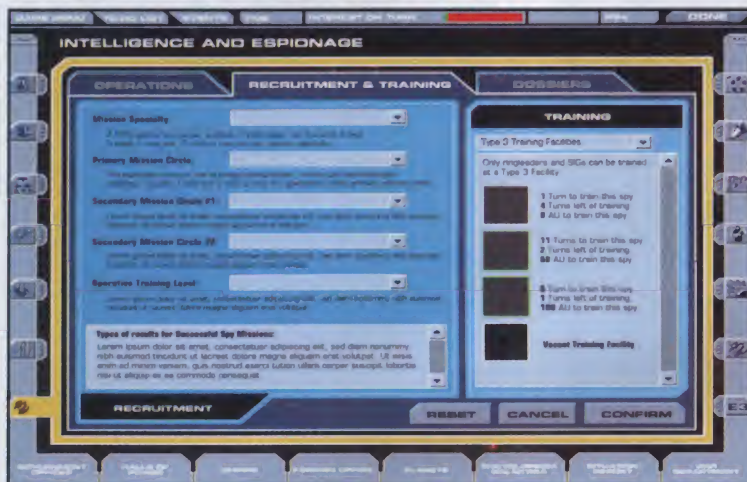
↑ Espionage plays a big part in *MOO3*, and you can win the game through this means alone.

↑ Check planet environments are suitable before plonking your inhabitants on them.

MASTER OF ORION 3

Complex, deep, challenging… it's all a bit too much for *Chris Anderson*

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Quicksilver
PUBLISHER Infogrames
WEBSITE www.quicksilver.com
OUT Q1 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

● Real-time combat for the first time in the series
● Staggering depth and complexity
● Planetary leaders take over mundane tasks
● Retains the solid gameplay that made the first two titles so successful

I f ever there was a heavy-duty turn-based strategy game that had casual gamers running to their mums as soon as the first screen loaded up, the *Master Of Orion* series has got to be one of the most fearsome.

Staggering depth with ever-branching research trees and a turn-based combat system is bound to appeal to hardcore strategy gamers but will inevitably leave newcomers to the genre completely cold. While developers Quicksilver are the first to admit *MOO3* has been designed first

and foremost for existing fans of the series, *MOO3* makes one or two concessions that are obviously intended to make life easier for those unfamiliar with the first two titles.

A fairly comprehensive tutorial will guide players through the initial screens, teaching them how to use the many tools at their disposal to quickly find the information they need in order to progress through the game. The interface too has been given something of an overhaul, and Quicksilver says you can get to anywhere you need to be in the game with just two clicks of a mouse button. If this is true it will be a first for games of this type, which

normally do their utmost to hide the information you need behind a plethora of screens. These are inevitably followed by dozens more sub-screens, all apparently intent on wasting your time instead of helping

you get on with the game. However, the biggest change in *MOO3* is not related to the interface, nor is it a matter of aesthetics. It's an altogether more radical change, and one we feel will make or break the game upon its release…

MACROMANAGEMENT

Macromanagement. What the hell is that, you may well ask. It's rather simple. The micromanagement that featured heavily in the first two games and tasked you with managing every detail of your planets, ships, and economy etc, has been replaced with planetary leaders who'll deal with the

minutae of your operation while you get on with putting the big picture together. Each planet will have one of these leaders who'll manage everything for you to the best of their abilities, but

those of you who love tinkering will still be able to interject if you feel your leaders are not up to the task.

The addition of real-time (albeit slow and tactical) combat will further open up the series to new initiates when it's released early next year. We will of course be there to give you the full lowdown as soon as we get our hands on review code. **PZ**

> **❝The addition of real-time (albeit slow and tactical) combat will further open up the series to new initiates❞**

Nice to see we're still around in the distant future.

So many new features in just one game.

The virtual cockpits make life so much easier.

Heathrow is no longer randomly stuck on the map.

MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2002

Despite the rumours, *Paul Presley* has never owned, worn or been in the same room as an anorak. Honest

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Microsoft
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk/games
OUT TBC

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Auto-generated ground objects
- 3D virtual cockpits
- It features better graphics and scenery all round

Weeelllllll, someone's certainly been listening to me. As always I know that the first pages you all turn to as soon as you receive your monthly dose of Zonebuprofen is whatever flight simulation preview or review I happen to be bringing you. And, as always, you leave feeling satisfied, educated, entertained and more than just a little moist in the nether regions. But until now I had absolutely no idea I was speaking to anyone other than our usual discerning readership.

It would seem, however, that the great and the good are also reading. As is evidenced by the inclusion of something called AutoGen in the latest version of *Microsoft's Flight Sim* series. Ever since I first headed off to the virtual skies I've been complaining about (*Surely it's more like 'making constructive remarks?' – Ed.*) the lack of quality ground scenery. It's fine flying along at 20,000ft and seeing lovely mountain terrain, but head over any major metropolis and you'll have been sorely disappointed. Not any more.

66 Combined with an increased amount of dynamic scenery (other planes), the ATC adds yet another notch to the realism level 99

FLAPPY HAPPY

AutoGen has arrived. It is essentially a way of adding random (albeit appropriate) ground objects to dull, lifeless terrain. Office blocks over cities, barns and mills over farmland, trees over forests, and so on. Hence flying low in *Microsoft Flight Sim 2002* now offers a more realistic experience. Granted it's pretty generic, but it's a start.

As you would expect, there are plenty of graphical enhancements including wingtip contrails, water effects and reflective metal textures. More importantly, though, is the addition of 3D virtual cockpits, used to such great effect in the *Flight Unlimited* series (seems I'm not the only one Microsoft is paying attention to – *cough*).

Other additions include sailplanes for water-based scenarios, vastly improved airports and – drum roll please – proper ATC. Yup, all the fun of discussing taxiway assignments and squawking recognition codes to very bored men in airport towers. Combined with an increased amount of dynamic scenery (other planes), the ATC adds another notch to the realism levels.

Otherwise it's business as visually enhanced normal. There are the usual two editions (the professional version costs £20 extra and comes with two extra planes, editing software and a £15 cashback voucher for existing *Flight Sim* owners).

So, just to return to the beginning, as Microsoft is now obviously hanging on my every word, let me just say this to them: add a career mode. The biggest criticism levelled at civil flight sims by non-enthusiasts is a complete lack of purpose. A simple career mode, in which you start with a little Cessna at a local airport, flying tourists about or delivering packages until you earn enough money to upgrade your bird or take your advanced licences (à la *Gran Turismo*), eventually working your way into a fabulous career with a major airline. Rest assured though, dear readers, now that we have some good ground scenery I'll be beating this 'career mode' drum with plenty of vigour from now on until someone relents. So then, are you with me? (*No – A Reader.*) **PZ**

REVIEWS

What's the score?

⭐ **REVIEWS EDITOR** Martin Korda

This month we have one of the best cross sections of games that we've had in a long time. In terms of scores that is. Our scoring system has been truly stretched to its limits, with marks ranging from the sewerage-encrusted depths of pantsness to the shining heights of classic brilliance. However, after trawling through our ramblings about the latest collection of PC games, it might strike you as strange why none of them – not even the ones which will have you clamming up at the armpit from sheer excitement – appear in our Top 100. So before you write in to complain, let me reassure you that these games will appear in next month's Top 100, when you'll be seeing quite a few changes with our new entries.

Our Top 100 is unique when it comes to recommending the very best in PC gaming, as we re-score games in light of new entries. After all it's nothing short of idiotic to score a game at 90 per cent two years after its release, when ten other games have surpassed it. Just because it's groundbreaking at the time, doesn't mean it stacks up several years later. If that was the case, we'd still have *Chuckie Egg* in there somewhere. Personally, I couldn't think of anything worse.

So what gaming delights do we have this month to help fill up those long, dark post-Christmas evenings when you need to escape the babblings of your insane auntie and stop feigning interest in cousins you haven't seen since last Christmas? For starters there's *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon*, which Mark has been feverishly playing. It's affected him so profoundly that the last time he came to the office, no one recognised him as he'd cunningly disguised himself as a pot plant. Meanwhile, I've been having extensive therapy sessions for advanced paranoia after playing through *AvP2*. In fact it's amazing I'm still working here, as Dave hates me and I'm positive Anthony and Richie are conspiring to kill me. That is if the beast stalking the air-conditioning vents doesn't get me first.

For strategy fans there's *Empire Earth* and *Stronghold*, which should fulfil all your megolomaniac cravings, while the stunning *IL-2 Sturmovik* will have flight sim fans reaching excitedly for their flight sticks, after which they'll probably find a yoke and play the game. Whatever your choice though, have yourself a great Christmas.

MOST WANTED... RPG

STAR WARS GALAXIES
Activision • ETA Christmas 2002

DEUS EX 2
Eidos • ETA 2003

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
Interplay • ETA Q2 2002

DUNGEON SIEGE
Microsoft • Q1 2002

ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
Virgin • ETA Q1 2002

DIVINE DIVINITY
CDV • ETA spring 2002

WORLD OF WARCRAFT
Vivendi • ETA TBC

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
Activision • ETA Christmas 2002

NEOCRON
CDV • ETA spring 2002

FINAL FANTASY XI
Publisher: TBC • ETA TBC

WHERE TO CALL

Having trouble finding any of the games listed in the reviews section of the magazine? Here are the numbers you need to call:

Acclaim 020 7344 5000 • **Activision** 08705 143525 • **CDV** 020 8880 4144 • **Codemasters** 01926 814132 • **Eidos Interactive** 020 8636 3000 • **Electronic Arts** 01932 450134 • **Empire Interactive** 020 8343 7337 • **EON** 0700 4366344 • **Infogrames** 0161 837 8000 • **Interplay** 020 7551 4222 • **Koch Media** 01256 707 767 • **Microids** 01908 223 377 • **Microsoft** 08457 002 000 • **Midas** 01279 858000 • **Novalogic** 020 7324 8900 • **Rage Software** 0151 237 2200 • **Take 2 Interactive** 01753 854 444 • **THQ** 01483 767656 • **Ubi Soft** 01932 838 230 • **Virgin Interactive** 020 7551 4266 • **Vivendi** 01189 209100

MEET THE TEAM

All *PC ZONE*'s reviewers are experts in their field. We like to give every game that comes in for review the best chance, which is why we give it to a fan of the genre

What do you want for Christmas?

WHAT DO OUR SCORES MEAN?

90-100% If a game receives a Classic award in *PC ZONE* you know that it's going to be brilliant. We reward originality and innovation, but we also rate games that take an existing genre to new heights. It's the experience that counts – if it delivers top-notch entertainment, we'll stamp it with our seal of approval and you should go out and buy it.

80-89% We don't give out 90% scores willy-nilly and this means that there's a mass of superb games that miss out on the Classic rating. This is where the Award of Excellence comes in, an accolade for a game that we believe is far superior to others in the genre.

70-79% Our reviews are much more than just a number at the end. If a game scores in this category it's well worth a punt and provides quality entertainment, but make sure you read the text to see why we didn't think it was worthy of an Award of Excellence.

50-69% We score all our games from a full percentage which means that a score of 50% is an average game – worth considering if you're bored with life and there's no football on the television. Take this closer to the 70% mark and you're looking at a quality game with the ability to impress.

20-49% These games just about manage to keep their heads above the excrement, but only just and shouldn't be considered unless you've exhausted every other avenue. Why should you waste your time playing games that are sub-standard or below average? You're better off with one of our cover discs.

0-19% Incompetence, sloth or just a desire to cash in and make an easy buck? Either way, there are no excuses for these games. Avoid at all costs and if possible make a mental note of the developer's name and stick it on your blacklist.

DAVE WOODS
GENRE Shooters, arcade
CURRENTLY PLAYING *AvP2* and *Ghost Recon*

A DVD player that doesn't break a week after the guarantee expires

RICHIE SHOEMAKER
GENRE Action, strategy
CURRENTLY PLAYING *AvP2*, *Stronghold* and *CM 01/02*

A big box of nappies

REVIEWS POLICY

We're on this planet to serve you. You need to know which games are worth buying, which ones are worth considering for a rainy day and which ones you should point at and laugh. For that reason, *PC ZONE* works a little differently to any other games magazine.

FINISHED CODE
We only review finished code which is released by the publisher. On occasions this means reviewing from gold masters, but this still means that what we see is what you get in the box.

HONEST REVIEWING
If there are problems with a game we'll tell you about them even if it means falling foul of some of the big names in the industry. We're not in print to serve as an advertising tool to publishers or big name developers with an ego problem, we're here to give you our honest opinions of a game.

THE REVIEWERS
Our reviewers are the best in the industry both in terms of experience and ability. We also make sure that every game is reviewed by an expert in the field. You won't find an RTS being reviewed by an FPS fan, and you can be sure that the person reviewing a game has played all the benchmark titles and knows how each game stands up in the face of the bigger picture.

THE MACHINES
We test out the games we review across a variety of different machines and graphics cards. In our office we have access to a wider range of machines from the lowly P233 to the 1.4GHz behemoth. If we spot any aberrations between developer claims and real-life testing we'll let you know.

ONLINE GAMING
We review a lot of games before they go on sale, which means that it's impossible to properly review the online side of a game simultaneously. Instead of taking a wild guess, or testing it on the comfort of the office LAN, we'll wait until servers are running and then revisit the game in our dedicated online section.

DISAGREE?
After all this you might still disagree with us. If so then write in and complain to our Feedback section, which is where we give you the chance to have your say and where any rumblings are answered by the individual reviewer.

REVIEWS CONTENTS

MARTIN KORDA
GENRE Action, strategy, sport
CURRENTLY PLAYING AvP2

World peace and a Porsche

ANTHONY HOLDEN
GENRE FPS, action/adventure, arcade
CURRENTLY PLAYING AvP2

Greater understanding for my fellow man

RHIANNA PRATCHETT
GENRE RPG, RTS, adventure
CURRENTLY PLAYING Stronghold and AvP2

A nice pink girlie jumper with a bunny rabbit on it

MARK HILL
GENRE Adventure, RPG, FPS, strategy
CURRENTLY PLAYING Ghost Recon and Commandos 2

A lamppost

STEVE HILL
GENRE Management, sport, arcade
CURRENTLY PLAYING Champ Manager 01/02

To be paid on time

DAN EMERY
GENRE Strategy, flight sims
CURRENTLY PLAYING IL-2 Sturmovik

Longer legs

TOM CLANCY'S
GHOST RECON

⭐ £34.99 • Ubi Soft • Out now

He's no friend of Tom Clancy, but
Mark Hill **reckons this ghost's a hit**

PCZONE
AWARD FOR
EXCELLENCE

The detail on your soldiers is very impressive and each one looks completely different up close.

Adrian Jensen

HEALTHY

O'BRIEN

23/10

1/5

M16/M203

A lot of ink has been spilled chronicling, explaining and commentating on the terrible events of September 11, and a PC games magazine is no place to analyse them further. But there's no denying that the terrorist attacks have had an effect on the games we play. Not only have many of them been canned, delayed or modified because of in-game terrorists or recreations of the Twin Towers, there's also something eerie about playing war games while there's a real one going on.

That this one is Tom Clancy-endorsed just makes it even stranger. After all, this is the man who told us about a Japanese terrorist flying a 747 into Capitol Hill and an Ebola attack from Iran (in *Executive Orders*, of which a film version is likely to be cancelled). He also described Arab terrorists planting a nuclear bomb at the Super Bowl (in *The Sum of All Fears*, another unlikely adaptation which is still in production). It's not surprising the CIA is rumoured to have contacted him and other thriller writers so

they can prevent future book plots from happening in the real world.

As for the plot of *Ghost Recon*, it takes place in 2008 and involves a rebellion in the Georgian republic which escalates into an international conflict between Russia and the US/UN alliance, apparently

Bushes and weeds make good cover, but you can still shoot through them.

because those damn Ruskies are trying to start a communist regime all over again. It's all very confusing, but you don't really need to concern yourself with it too much. All you need to know is who to shoot and what to blow up. In a brilliant stroke of foresight, developer Red Storm

decided against making the enemy a Middle Eastern rogue state (an idea which was discussed) and wisely dumped you in the cold green hills of the Union Formerly Known as Soviet rather than some Arab mountains.

In case you haven't gathered from the screenshots, this is a

team-based tactical shooter in the *Hidden & Dangerous* and *Operation Flashpoint* mould, but there are some pretty significant differences to those titles. Anyone who's played *Rainbow Six* or *Rogue Spear* will be immediately familiar with the feel of the game although this time the close-quarters interiors have been replaced with massive outside locations, and the anti-terrorist squad makes way for a new Special Forces unit from the US army known as ghosts. Probably so-called because, like most soldiers in team-based shooters, they keep ending up dead.

HIT THE RED TARGET

If there is one thing that the war campaign against the Taliban has taught us, it's that real life is much more forgiving than games. If you showed the same degree of accuracy in *Ghost Recon* as the US has displayed in their bombing of Afghanistan, it would be game over within seconds. There's no room here for a 'whoops, we seem to be five miles off our target and have hit a Red Cross building instead' approach. Right from the word go you are left to

"There's a spider on my leg! Kill it! Kill it!"

the mercy of the elements, fighting against rain, snow and wind, with nothing but trees and rocks to cover you. If you spot a group of enemy soldiers you better be damned sure you hit them, otherwise they're going to be counting the bullets out of your body back home.

The initial effect is a bit disorienting if you're used to opening a door, peeking round the corner and creeping along the carpet, as you'd do in *Rogue Spear* or in that other great team-based tactical shooter, *SWAT 3*. Here you're dwarfed by a vast expanse of sky while land stretches out in almost every direction. Many of the missions – there are 15 in all – take place in wooded areas, and *Red Storm* has taken great care to recreate the real thing. Forget about the trees in *Flashpoint*, those sickly messes of brown and green smudges. In *Ghost Recon* the trees look like they could produce oxygen as they sway in

the breeze, and even lose leaves when you shoot through them. The forests feel alive with sound and breathing nature; this is probably the closest a game has come to simulating a trip to the woods. But what does it feel like to play in them?

Well, first I should tell you that there's more to the game than trees. Missions are varied and take place in foggy marshes, snowy cities and ruined villages. Objectives are all standard fare, such as rescuing downed pilots, blowing up bridges and tanks and clearing areas of enemy forces. Needless to say, a gung-ho approach will have you dead within seconds. This is a game that requires plenty of tactical thinking. Thankfully, the obnoxious pre-mission planning from the *Rainbow Six* series is gone, replaced with a flashy in-game command system. At the stroke of a key you can bring up a tiny map, where you can give

orders to your three teams, made up of a maximum of six soldiers overall. You can give them waypoints, tell them to lay down suppressive fire, go into recon mode or cover an area for enemies. The action doesn't stop while you're in the command map, but it doesn't take long to get used to it and tell your soldiers what to do. There are also a group of hotkeys that control their stance and movement, making it easy to lay ambushes.

GUNS LAST ALL SUMMER LONG

You are only ever in control of a single soldier, but you can jump into any of the others whenever you like. This is important because, although you can give orders, you need to do much of the shooting yourself. This isn't a criticism. If you could just sit back giving orders and letting your team do all the work it would be a very boring game. Artificial intelligence has recently got a lot of bad press, thanks mainly to a rather dreadful Spielberg movie, but the AI in this game is well balanced. Enemies are not so intelligent that they're impossible

to kill (their hearing on the medium difficulty setting is bad enough that they don't all come running when you fire a shot) but they're smart enough to take cover and lie down, and the fact that they're not always deadly accurate with their shots just makes them more realistic. Because the nature of the game isn't inclined towards arcade shooting, the kind of sharp AI present in *Half-Life* wouldn't work here anyway. Similarly, your computer-controlled team members are smart enough to

take cover and shoot down enemies within sight (unless you've put them on recon mode), but not so good that you can send them ahead to take care of business while you sit back.

The difficulty is balanced equally carefully. It's not so hard that you get stuck in an impossible situation, but not so easy that you can just Rambo your way through it without some creative tactical thinking. The game is really more about co-ordinating attacks and getting your men in the right positions at

> ## "A gung-ho approach will have you dead within seconds. This is a game that requires plenty of tactical thinking"

Who knows what dreams and aspirations are seeping out of his bullet-ridden skull?

INPERSPECTIVE

Operation Flashpoint might have had an unpolished look (and a bagful of bugs) but if you're not after total realism it's still top of the list. If you want a more personal, spatially confined challenge, *SWAT 3* is your game. *Ghost Recon* manages to combine elements from both: wide-open spaces with a military feel as well as an excellent command system.

Ghost Recon

Operation Flashpoint

Rogue Spear

Hidden & Dangerous

SWAT 3

the right time than it is about first-person shooting skills.

DOT TO DOT

As in *Operation Flashpoint* you spend much of your time shooting at little dots on the horizon. Thankfully, you can use a sniper right from the start so you can zoom in and see who you're killing. Even so, this is more likely to turn the enemies into visible human shapes rather than make their heads cover the screen. I'm sure it's realistic, but it's a shame that you don't get to see the detail of those enemies up close until they're corpses littering the ground. For the same reason you don't often get to see their great death animations, where shot soldiers grab their stomachs and whirl to the floor in a perfect motion-captured demise.

Missions against tanks require a demolitions expert on your team.

This is one of the main problems with the graphics. The wide-open spaces don't allow much room for detail – except for the trees – and it's all

66 The engine has its limitations, as evinced by the rather heavy fogging effects 99

concentrated on the brilliant models. But there's only so much time you can spend looking at your own team members. The engine also has its limitations, as evinced by the rather heavy fogging effects. Don't expect to snipe someone at the distances

you could in *Project IGI*. The wide outside spaces also make it hard to always know what's going on, and you could easily find yourself under fire without having a clue

where it's coming from. When this happens, unless you find cover pretty sharpish, you'll experience a rather painful death which will have you recoiling from your mouse as if you'd been hit yourself. You can almost feel the bullet kicking the life ➡

FOLLOW MY LEAD

Ghost Recon's multiplayer game should keep everyone happy

The multiplayer game allows up to 36 people to take part spread out across six teams. As in the single-player game, there is a command interface, but only one person per team can give orders. When they die, the game automatically promotes the next in line and if you don't agree with their tactics you can vote them out. But the biggest innovation, and the thing that should elevate *Ghost Recon*'s online status, is the ability to lead a group of AI soldiers against other human opponents also leading a computer-controlled team. So you don't need 36 people to start massive battles. We'll let you know how this works in practice when we review it in the online section. You can also play through the single-player game with your buddies. If the whole team ethic doesn't appeal to you however, you can still go at it solo. Online modes include Hamburger Hill, where you have to control a zone of the map for the longest time possible; Last Man Standing, Search and Rescue and Sharpshooter, where the player with most kills wins. Take your choice.

You occasionally need to protect or rescue UN soldiers, but you can't control them or give them orders.

Will you be a follower or a leader?

out of you before you thud to the ground in an expanding pool of crimson. But, while death nearly always arrives with a single shot to the head, you can also get injured. Each of your soldiers' bodies is divided into zones (simplified versions of JC

of soldiery spider sense – which shows you the general direction of the enemy and tells you when you're really close to them. It also shows you the direction you're being shot at from.

Like I said before, it's not all trees and forests. Night missions

Gary wasn't sure his new coloured contact lenses were a good idea.

"Get shot in the leg and not only will you slow down, you'll hear your own gasps of pain"

Denton's in *Deus Ex*) so you can see where you've been hit. Get shot in the leg and not only will you slow down, you'll hear your own gasps of pain, making you wince with every step.

You do get some help in the way of a threat indicator – a sort

work well, but they're short enough so that the green night vision doesn't start to irritate your eyes. The best levels are the ones based in cities, where you have the benefit of windows to snipe from (and from where you have to pick off enemy gunners), cars to

SPECIAL FORCES

Ghost Recon comes with a few nice RPG touches

At the start of the game you have a pool of soldiers to choose from – riflemen, support, demolition, sniper – and each one has stats in four different attributes: weapons, stealth, endurance and leadership. Every time a soldier survives a mission you get a point to spend (two if he or she manages a lot of kills, which is a nice bonus). Not only can you can start building characters straight away, but you can relate to them more than usual. In addition, completing secondary objectives unlocks specialist characters who excel in their field and make your job easier later on. These make you realise how important the RPG system is. Not only do you notice significant improvements in your movements, speed and accuracy, you also get some better weapons. The sniper rifle in particular is much better than your initial one and just makes the challenge all the more rewarding.

⊙ This guy's sniper rifle is way cooler than your starting one.

⊙ The stats really do make a noticeable difference.

Someone forgot to pack his bulletproof vest.

hide behind and the sort of surroundings most of us feel more comfortable in. You usually get closer to your enemies in urban settings too, so they don't become distant dots so much.

THIS FOOD IS A GIFT FROM THE PEOPLE OF THE USA

But while *Ghost Recon* has nothing to do with terrorists or the Middle East, it still feels a bit sinister to be controlling US soldiers infiltrating another country, and shooting soldiers in order to 'sort out' that country. Especially when you get things like this in the briefings: "There are plenty of refugees in the streets and we want to keep collateral damage to a minimum." After seeing some of the collateral damage in Afghanistan it's very

difficult to suspend your disbelief and pretend you're just playing at soldiers. This is, as I've already mentioned, more of a hardcore simulation than a fantasy shoot 'em up. Remember that the *Rogue Spear* engine, of which this is a heavily modified version, is being used by the US military to train their soldiers. It makes you wonder about the future of these kind of titles as they get more and more realistic. For the moment though, *Ghost Recon* is good enough for you to push any moral dilemmas aside and concentrate on team-based tactics and good old shooting reflexes. And it possesses the main ingredient so essential to these types of games: no matter how many times you die, you keep coming back for more until you've cracked it.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 450 **Memory** 128Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 16Mb 3D card **WE SAY** The open-air engine really needs a lot of power and we'd recommend even more memory and a 32Mb 3D card to avoid slowdown

PCZVERDICT

⊙ **UPPERS** Wide-open spaces • Excellent command interface • RPG element gets you more involved • Very atmospheric

⊙ **DOWNERS** Heavy fogging • Lack of general detail • Enemies usually dots in the distance

86 A masterful combination of tactics and action

CHRISTMAS DAY 14-03-02

ALIENS VS
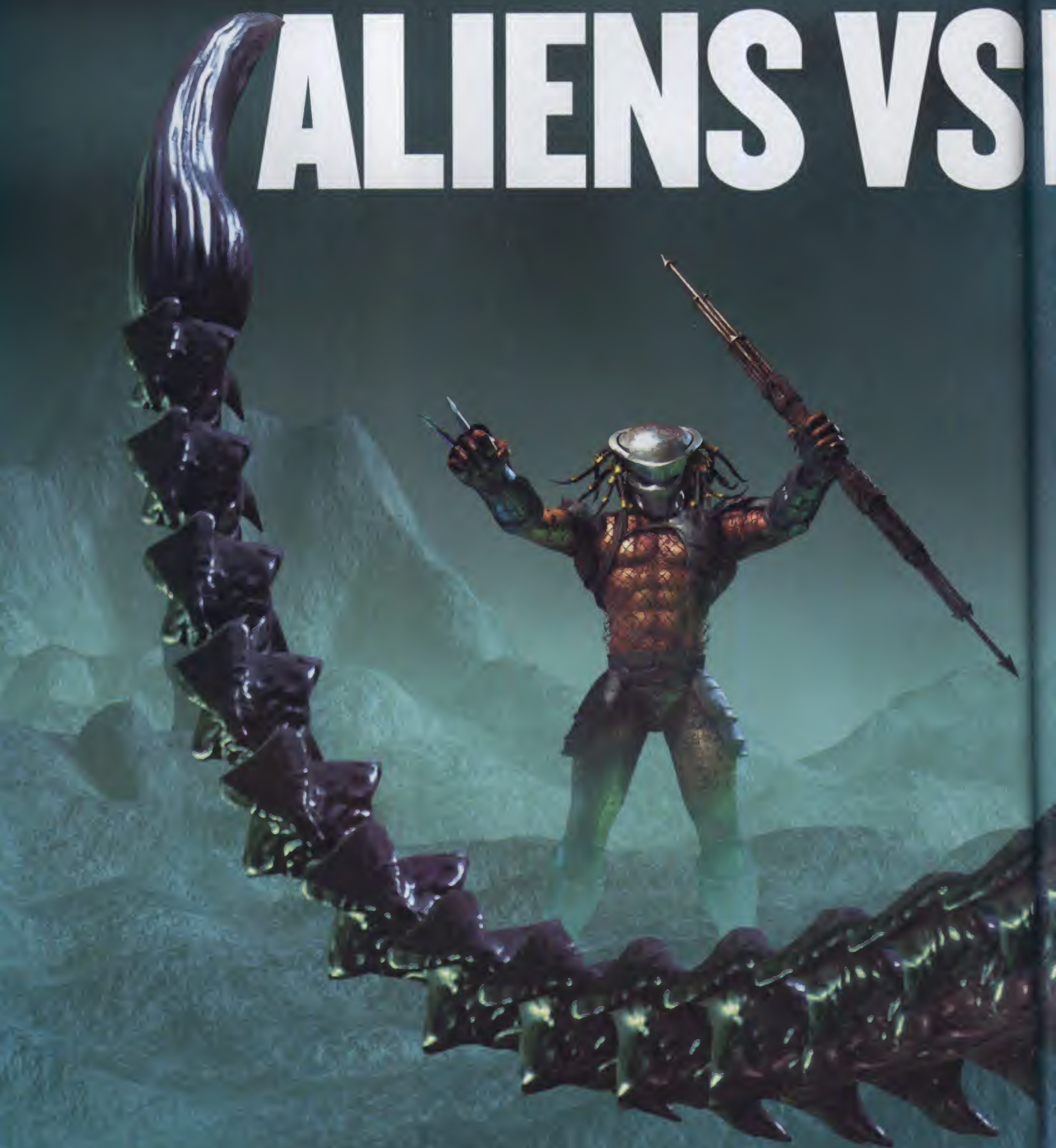
PREDATOR 2

£29.99 • Vivendi • December

In an end-of-terrace house, everyone can hear you scream… as *Martin Korda* found out when he got evicted

There's something out there, and it aint no man. I hear footsteps behind me, and heavy, laboured breathing. Sweat breaks out across my forehead and my lower lip quivers in panicked desperation. I wheel around in terror, shouting, "Die, you Alien bastard!" and mimic firing a gun while bellowing a war cry. A confused old woman with a wheely bag looks back at me and wets herself where she stands, while I throw myself at her feet and beg her not to rip out my spinal column. I think something might be wrong with me. What's more, I've recently acquired a strange phobia of curved black pipes, attacking them with the intensity of a rutting badger at every given opportunity, convinced they're about to jump out at me and carve out my throat. And they are you know, mark my words. So I've been sealing myself into my room, welding the door shut every night with steel bolts. There I sit, rocking in the corner, dribbling on my chest and flinching at the sound of the churnings of my own gastro fluids. Something's definitely not right. But given the circumstances, perhaps it's hardly surprising.

For five days before this all started, I'd been living a hermit's existence, devoid of human company, encamped in a darkened room playing Monolith's new FPS, *AvP2*. But this isn't just your average FPS, ooooh no. It slowly reduces you to a tearful hunchback with clawed hands and a stammer, fearful of the world outside your front door and almost as much of the one inside it, because this is the single most terrifying game you'll ever experience – so

> **This is the most terrifying game ever. It should be shipped with a pack of man-sized incontinence pads**

scary that it should be shipped with a packet of man-sized incontinence pads, and a listing of local psychotherapists. It worms itself into your psyche, reducing you to a gibbering, drooling wreck who gets frightened by bemused barely vertical pensioners with trolleys. And therein lies its true beauty.

MARINE WARS
AvP2 bases itself around one huge, convoluted and twist-ridden tale, in which a group of marines is sent to a deep-space outpost to investigate a loss of communications but, inevitably, things turn out to be a great deal more complicated than that. However, rather than offering just one perspective on a story, you're given three, one for each of the races: human, Predator and Alien. And with each new viewpoint, comes a totally different game. What will strike you most once you've ground your fingernails down to a fine dust waiting for each campaign to load, is the sheer depth, attention to detail and thought that has gone into every single mission, into the different pace, atmosphere and feel of each species and the angle that the story is approached from. And best of all, once you've played them all, these three massive segments merge to make a whole which will reveal the entirety of a conspiracy-fuelled plotline, and which will have you gripped from the first spilt drop of blood to the last epic confrontation.

By far the best choice is to play the Marine missions first. Not that I'm trying to influence you or anything, but they're the best ones. Just trust me on this one, ok? You play a stereotypically square-jawed and idiotically brave soldier called Harrison, with a nasty habit of volunteering for suicide missions which inevitably end up getting you your internal organs rearranged. You're all like, "Yes sir, I'd love to go in first, sir, and have my head ripped off, sir". You bloody little swot. Proper little Captain's pet. The type of person who'd wash the CO's arse if ordered to do so without complaint. With their tongue. You'll get yours. And you do. All of about 15 seconds after the intro sequence.

JELLY BOTTY
You're instantly thrown into a set of missions which will chill you to the marrow and unstopper your rectal passage faster than a greased-up poker. These include heroically charging into an Alien's nest to nobly save a comrade, before conducting a not-so-noble hasty retreat. During numerous pursuits reminiscent of James Cameron's stunning film *Aliens*, you'll fire off every last bullet into hordes of enemies, cack-handedly missing with

→

I was only trying to get a crumb off his face.

What a beautiful manicure.

20

Is it just me or is it hot in here?

90 per cent of them as the superbly coded AI makes your pack-like enemies leap at you from all angles. If you shoot them on the floor, they'll run across a wall. Shoot at the wall and they'll be ripping at your skull from the ceiling. And just when you've got them in your sights you hear the soul-destroying click of your magazine running dry, choking in a pool of your own blood as you futilely try to reload.

The fear is so consuming that you have to train yourself to fire in short bursts, otherwise you'll be left with just a pathetic knife and inevitable death. However, rather than facing mission after countless mission of waves of Aliens charging mindlessly towards you, you'll also find yourself up against a variety of other opponents. Such as Predators. Nice chaps, really. Shame about the skinning, hanging upside down and their propensity for collecting skulls, though. Namely yours. Then there's face-huggers, chest-bursters and human guards (yup, you get to shoot humans too), each of which require a totally different tactic to defeat. Oh yes, and a few surprises which I won't spoil for you.

The marine has a devastating array of weaponry, including perfectly reproduced pulse rifles with a grenade launcher, which produces a rasping firing sound that mingles harmoniously with the rasps from your sphincter, as well as smart guns which home in on the enemy before cutting them up into a thousand acid-stained lumps, which will damage you if you get too intimate with them. A flame-thrower, rocket launcher and shotgun are amongst others in a well-thought-out collection.

SEE NO EVIL, HEAR THE EVIL
The pace is perfectly balanced, and in line with the better *Alien* and *Predator* films, fear is often built through that which you don't see rather than that which you do. The distant screams of victims being shredded, brief glimpses of enemy shadows down the other side of corridors and authentic sound effects lifted straight out of the films are just the start of it. The wind is eerily daunting, while your overly sensitive motion tracker will have you firing wildly at inanimate objects (like loose pipes) swinging in the breeze.

The context-sensitive soundtrack seamlessly blends itself into each situation and some masterfully erratic lighting and steam effects complete the most psychologically scarring, heart-condition-inducing gaming experience of all time. And, if at the end you somehow manage to pick your shattered carcass-like body off the floor, you'll find there are two more totally different games to experience, and while they're not quite up to the standard of the Marine missions, they're a damn site more entertaining than the majority of stand-alone FPSs we've been forcably subjected to over the last few years since *that* game.

MAIM OF THE GAME
The Predator campaign is very different, with missions best described as *Thief* with dismemberment. In true hunter

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MULTIPLE (UN)FRIENDLY TARGETS

Ever wanted to gut a friend like a fish? You sicko... oh, go on then...

No bots, but you'll still get a runny one when playing in multiplayer, because once again it'll have you firing at imaginary enemies before you get killed by an unseen one. Probably by your mate Keith or someone. The bastard. There's a choice of four characters (Predator, Alien, marine and Corporates – similar to marines) all of which have four slightly varied classes. And you probably won't be too surprised to hear that playing as each one of the races is a hugely different experience. Deathmatch games are generally mid-paced, with tactics playing a major role, especially when taking on a couple of opponents, and two marines against one Predator provides a superb game of cat and mouse, especially

on the larger levels. Hunt places one or more Predator against a pre-defined ratio of marines. Only hunters can accumulate frags, but should the Predator be gunned down at any point, their executioner swaps places with them. Survivor is a bit of a last-man-standing affair, while Overrun (a round-based team annihilation game) and Evac (a race to get your group of marines to a designated extraction point before they're butchered by the opposition team of Aliens), have more than a passing resemblance to *Counter-Strike*. Both modes are incredibly tense affairs and, with enough players, can result in plenty of carnage and wild firing which will end up killing more of your team-mates than the enemy. The levels vary in size,

but from what we've played of them so far, are hardly groundbreaking. But we'll cast our final judgement in a couple of months' time when we review the multiplayer options in our Online section. By then there should be plenty of servers up and running for us to sink our claws into.

In-engine cut-scenes keep the story moving.

You boys look a bit off-colour.

Oh OK then, but no tongues.

style, you must track your prey unseen, before parting them from their skulls. With the ability to leap huge distances, you can jump from tree to tree like a dreadlocked Tarzan and while this is somewhat fiddly at first, you'll soon find yourself prancing about like a homicidal ballet dancer.

The Predator's weaponry and gadgetry is also pretty impressive stuff. Weapons include a sniper gun, spear and wrist blades, not

The cloaking device helps you move unseen (obviously), but drains your limited power supply quickly, while a medipack lets you inject more energy into your green-blood-smattered body. In fact, most of these toys drain your power source, so it's just as well you can regenerate, but you are left prone for a few seconds. However, seeing as your healing powers are based on how much energy you have, it's sometimes

"Fear is often built through that which you don't see, rather than that which you do"

forgetting the shoulder-mounted laser. Your mask lets you view the world in several different ways, including thermal imaging which is perfect for night-time raids, and a zoom option which is ideal for pre-planning ambushes. It takes some practice, but certain weapons need different view modes to lock on targets, but this does make the action very true to the films. You also have to be careful, as weapons which lock on cause you to de-cloak before you can fire them.

all too easy to just keep powering yourself up and boosting your health if you can find a secluded enough hiding place, although if you find yourself surrounded, there's no avoiding a kicking.

If you're spotted or heard by a patrolling guard, he'll either voice his concern or actively start looking for you. But he won't stop there. He'll keep on searching until either he finds you, or until you pummel his skull into a carbon pulp. He'll follow you through water and

track you by the plants you inadvertently brush as you move. However, it's a shame you don't leave trails of blood, as this really would have been the clincher, and guards are occasionally prone to standing around like mannequins until they're triggered by your presence.

LAUGHING AT DEATH

Now it may come as a surprise to you, but the Alien campaign is actually a bit of a laugh. Sounds a bit strange, right? Ripping open people's ribs, causing the mass-slaughter of innocent security guards. ha ha ha. Yes well done, that sounds totally hilarious, Martin. But just bear with me here. In a stroke of near-genius, you get to experience several angles of an Alien's life, starting off as a face-hugger, moving on to being a chest-burster, then a fully fledged Alien. And the execution is not only tense but, at times,

incredibly amusing. Take the chest-burster mission, where you have to find and feed off small mammals to help you grow. Your only form of attack is an ineffectual ankle bite, which means sticking to the shadows, while you scavenge for food inside a complex guarded by hordes of paranoid security guards. As your eyes are inside your mouth, it's impossible not to break down in a child-like hysteria and giggle maniacally as you chase desperately retreating guards around the complex and watch your teeth snap shut while being baked by flame throwers.

Again, the AI is generally superb when it comes to hunting

you down. Hide between some obligatory crates and they'll crouch down and find you. Run away and lose them in the shadows and they'll keep searching, muttering out loud that they should have put in for a transfer months ago. The authenticity of NPC actions, reactions and terrified babblings, as well as the conversations they hold to further the plotline (not only here, but in the other two campaigns as well), once again add a superb sense of authenticity to the proceedings. In the Alien missions, you actually feel as though these people are scared. Terrified. And it's all because of you. It's a complete reversal of the fear you experience as a marine. Now you're the one who can hide, walk on walls and hang off ceilings, although at first wall-walking is almost impossible to do with any effectiveness as you'll be totally disorientated. However, master it, and you'll be almost invincible. Almost. Other offensive options include tail, jaw and claw attacks, and a pounce option which literally tears hapless humans to mince. But once again, ➡

Yeah mate, the Post Office is just over there.

The Predator is a fearsome adversary.

Careful or you'll have someone's eye out with that.


They don't make digital watches like this anymore.

it's sometimes a tad too easy to regenerate, by simply devouring dead bodies. And on one further negative note, the Alien missions are more limited when compared to the other two, and it's a shame you don't really get to work as part of a team of drones. You're sort of a vigilante Alien hero, really. But that's not to say these missions aren't highly playable.

THINK THE UNTHINKABLE?

The more observant among you should have noticed a certain enthusiasm running through this review. And you'd be spot on. But there's still one thing I know you all want to know. Is it better than…? Could it be…? Surely not. For those of you who have no idea what I'm on about, I'll explain.

About three years ago, a game called *Half-Life* toddled on to the scene and has been unsurpassed since. What strikes me as incredible is that for years no developer learnt from that masterpiece of game programming. Never tried to better it (or if they did it was so pathetic none of us noticed). Until now. Whether *AvP2* is better than *Half-Life* will, in the end, come down to personal choice. And for me that choice is this. If I had to play one, I'd play *AvP2* – but it's a bloody close call. It's scarier, has more atmosphere, the multiplayer is far more varied and exciting (see the Multiple (Un)friendly Targets panel) and it looks a damn sight better, despite the slightly quirky character models thrown up by the Lithtech engine. It offers you three games, one superb thriller, one sneak 'em up and a hugely entertaining morphing Alien romp for the price of one. But it only achieves all this by copying the blueprint laid down by Valve all those years ago. The pace, the atmosphere, the
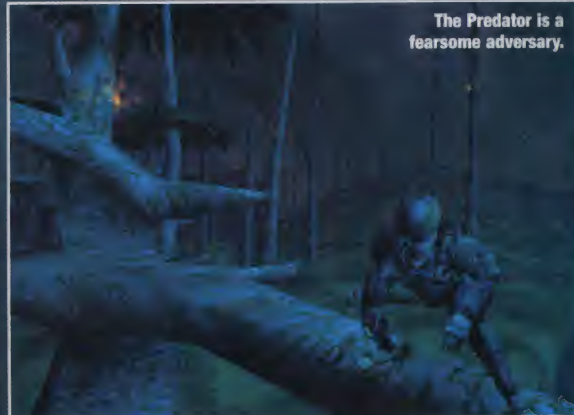
constant in-game development of the storyline, the twists, the turns, the superb AI, having to always think your way out of a situation rather than being shepherded to the next room, have all been influenced massively by that king of shooters. *AvP2* may lack the wide variety of enemies of *H-L*, and yes, *Half-Life* did do all this first, and in some departments, better. Three years ago. But we mustn't be afraid to move on, especially when a game this good comes along, and as games journalists and gamers we must have the courage to overcome the fear of saying so when something appears that can stack up to what has now become a virtually untouchable game.

A new age of FPSs is upon us, and while *Half-Life* will live on forever, more so maybe than *Doom*

or *Quake* and long after *AvP2*, it will have to move aside one day. For some (me included), that day is now. Many of you may disagree (especially if you've played the demo which does this game zero justice), but I 'm confident you'll love every minute of this essential masterpiece anyway. I've seen fear like never before and it's all down to a piece of software. I ain't afraid of any game, but *AvP2* ain't just any game. **PCZ**

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM PII 450 **MEMORY** 96MB RAM (128MB for Windows 2000 and XP) **ALSO REQUIRES** 16MB 3D card **WE SAY** A PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a high quality 32MB graphics card should make this run like a dream… or is that nightmare?

SECOND OPINION

On the fence sits a trembling *Richie Shoemaker*

Scarier than *Half-Life*, certainly more varied, but better? That's a tricky one. Having played and thoroughly enjoyed the original *Aliens Vs Predator*, my concerns were that *AvP2* would be too similar to its predecessor. Thankfully that isn't the case. In almost every way *AvP2* supercedes it; the action is more tense, the weapons more satisfying, the levels for each of the three races as diverse as you can imagine. But *AvP2* isn't as groundbreaking as *Half-Life* was. Where *Half-Life* relied on solid narrative and unrivalled AI, *AvP2* doesn't so much improve things as take a different route, admirably so, as with relentless Aliens to contend with, the developers were wise to remember that *AvP* gameplay is about basic survival rather than loftier goals such as saving the universe. What is true, however, is that *AvP2* certainly is the best shooter since *Half-Life*, the best *Aliens* game ever (on any platform), the best game from Monolith to date, and as true to the nature of the films and comics as you would hope for. Simply put, *AvP2* is a superb game and to avoid buying it makes you a big girly wuss. Be afraid. Be very afraid. (Wrong film – Ed).

IN PERSPECTIVE

There's very little to choose between *AvP2* and the mighty *Half-Life*, but no true shooter fan should be without either. *Clive Barker's Undying* is about as close you'll get to the psychological terror of *AvP2*.

AvP2:

Half-Life:

Clive Barker's Undying:

PCZ VERDICT

UPPERS Three games in one • Believable AI • Stunningly atmospheric • Heart stoppingly terrifying • Excellent plot • Large and diverse array of weaponry • Great multiplayer options

DOWNERS Overly long loading times • Not enough variety of enemies • Sometimes too easy to regenerate as a Predator or Alien

93 Chillingly brilliant

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A man of Xtreme tastes and Xtremely dubious morals, *Dave Woods* takes on the latest challenger for Colin's crown

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

With the carrion cry for decent AI reaching fever pitch, it's always refreshing to take a break and settle back with the latest rally release. Seeing as you're the only car in the whole game, AI is a non-factor, your opponents reduced to an on-screen time plucked out of thin air by the programmers. Did the leader actually post that amazing time, the one that you can't beat no matter how many times you play the game or how much you spend on a souped-up car? You'll never know. Ha!

Non-believers might not see the point in this, but the addictive quality of a decent rally game comes from the fact that without computer-controlled dodgems, the game is reduced to pure driving. You against the road, where you live and die by your mistakes, not because you've been taken off the road by a computer-controlled driver who won't budge off the racing line even if it means ploughing straight through you.

Up until now, *Colin McRae* has been the game of choice, but the *Rally Championship* series (of which this is the sixth) has always been right up its exhaust pipe. The new *Xtreme* release comes sandwiched between *CM2* (now out as an essential budget release) and *CM3* (see our news piece last issue), and it's this that gives it the chance to shine without having to go head-to-head with the dour Scot.

FEELING GROOVY

Graphically it takes the top of the podium. The visuals are

⊕ The obligatory vomit-inducing in-car shot. Don't do it.

breathtaking – pure and simple. I've sat through dozens of demos of bog standard rally games, and I haven't seen anything like this before, with amazing attention to detail, right down to the moving driver inside each beautifully recreated car. As with *Colin McRae*, each different surface looks and feels absolutely spot on, and the photo-realistic backdrops work well with the rendered courses, although it has to be said that this is because your eyes are usually fixed firmly on a spot in the road ten metres ahead of your car. Crash, give up a particular race and take in the overall effect and it looks slightly weird.

The physics model is also sublime, and small touches such as the fact that you can feel every bump you go over, and that each

of these can send you off course makes the going pretty tough. As with *Colin McRae*, these almost-invisible obstacles can send you into a spin or a head-on encounter with a wall even when you're travelling along a seemingly straight road.

In an attempt to appeal to as many people as possible, *Xtreme* features four different game

next checkpoint, and Challenge lets you unlock new cars and new courses by completing tasks. You can also play multiplayer on a LAN or the Internet, although at the time of reviewing we couldn't check the latter out, due to the lack of any servers, and LAN racing is as exciting and frustrating as anything we've played before. The only thing

> **❝Each surface looks and feels absolutely spot on, and the photo-realistic backdrops work well with the rendered courses❞**

modes. Championship is the full-on sim-rally experience, with you up against computer times in a bid to qualify for progressive races. Arcade is more of a console game, where you have a limited amount of time to make it to the

missing from this is the chance to battle out in arcade mode against computer-controlled drivers, as you can with *Colin McRae 2*. OK, it's not strictly rallying, but it's a missing bonus that counts against this new challenger.

⊕ Rallying is a lonely pursuit.

⊕ Well it's better than a dirt track in Wales.

⊕ Time your start or risk a time penalty.

⊕ Win money and buy a better car.

↑ Graphics so gorgeous you can almost smell the sewage.

↑ Repair you car in-between races.

↑ No foot and mouth 'ere.

SMASH YOUR LIFT UP

Arcade or simulation? *Xtreme* gives you a bit of both, with a real-time damage model and some guardian angels

Like *Colin McRae*, *Xtreme* is a cross between arcade action and simulation. In Championship mode your car gets scuffed up and it takes real-time damage. As proved if you smash into this train that has conveniently been left lying in the middle of the road. After each stage you can tinker with your car's set-up and repair any damage you've done.

It's not all real-life, though, which is lucky as I'd have virtually killed myself several times over the course of this review. Some of the tracks are suicidal, with huge drops and no barriers to stop you sliding towards certain death. You'd think body damage is the least of my worries here, but just before impact you're rescued Flash Gordon-style and find yourself back in the middle of the track with only a few seconds lost. How convenient.

Shortcuts are essential if you harbour ambitions of winning. Cutting corners is the obvious route to cutting time, but obstacles hurt and the surface is bumpier off the main roads. If you keep your eyes peeled you can find some hefty 'arcade' shortcuts that can cut up to 10 seconds off the drivers who keep to the path.

BOTTOM OF THE CLASS

Taking the Championship mode as the meat of the dish, and the place most of you are going to start, I should point out that if you haven't played a rally game before, and mastered the intricacies of the drive you're going to find the start of your life in *Xtreme* particularly dispiriting, because it's bloody hard. Learning curve? Actualise obviously hasn't grasped the concept because this is unforgiving from the off. Don't time your start right? Expect to come in the first checkpoint 5-10 seconds off the leaders, especially if you're penalised for a jump-start. Misjudge one corner, or lose concentration for a split second when your co-driver laconically spouts about a sudden hairpin and your stage is as good as over. Admittedly you can practise each stage before tackling it, and this helps, but you still need a memory that can take in the three or four problem points and regurgitate them at a moment's notice.

However, like all games that are deemed worthy of an Award of Excellence, *Xtreme* comes

good. I spent the first day coming fairly near the bottom of each rally, aided by a stinking hangover and a wish that I was in bed rather than in front of the PC. But, after putting in the groundwork I came back the next day refreshed and started crawling up, even winning my first stage. And the satisfaction I felt was immense, far more than being able to win the first six or seven races in *Colin McRae 2* easily.

Anyway, I don't suppose you're particularly interested in how I spend my weekends. What you

really want to know is whether this, at £34.99, is better than *Colin McRae 2* at £12.99. It's a toughie. If the dour Scot was still charging top whack for his services I'd probably point you towards *Xtreme*. If you have a top-end graphics card and you want to see results, again I'd err on the side of this new release. If you're just after an excellent rally game for your PC then there's hardly anything between the two. Except for the cash. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

There used to be one rally game of choice, now there's two. Ignore everything else and go and buy either *Colin McRae 2* on budget, or *Rally Championship Xtreme*. If you want a more arcade racer with other cars on the track try *Midtown Madness 2*.

Rally Championship Xtreme
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Colin McRae 2
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Midtown Madness 2
━━━━━━

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PIII 500
Memory 64Mb RAM, 16Mb video card
WE SAY Double the RAM and up the processor to a 600

PCZVERDICT

↑ **UPPERS** Looks and plays beautifully • Excellent physics model • Internet play

↓ **DOWNERS** Tough to start with • No other cars to race against • More expensive than *CM2*

85 Joins the leader of the pack

EMPIRE EARTH

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His mission, should he choose to accept it, is to review the most eagerly anticipated real-time strategy game of the year. "Oh alright then," says *Chris Anderson*

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

There has to have been a time – perhaps when you're waiting for that bus that never comes or when your mind is drifting while you're talking to the world's most boring person – that your thoughts have turned to what could possibly be the perfect computer game. While this is subjective to a large degree, there are certain game concepts that just cannot be argued with. One of them is a

In which to play the game, and a technology tree that RTS games could only dream about. It appears to be obvious then, that any game that could marry the timeline and complexity of *Civilization* with the edge-of-the-seat excitement of an RTS game, would surely be the perfect strategy game, or at least as damn close as you're ever going to get. That hypothetical game has finally arrived, and its name is *Empire Earth*.

IN THE BEGINNING...
Empire Earth takes you from prehistoric times right through to modern times and beyond, covering every important stage of human evolution along the

worked on *AOE* (Rick Goodman). In fact it's not unfair to describe it as *AOE* with a lot more epochs and a lot more units, so similar are the two titles. This, as we all know, is no bad thing. *AOE* is one of the best RTS games we've ever seen, so any game that claims to be *AOE* with knobs on surely can't be a bad thing, right? Well, yes, and no.

DIMENSIONAL DILEMMA
While there's nothing particularly wrong with 2D strategy games, we have come to expect proper 3D in just about every genre these days, and it's something of a shock to find that *Empire Earth*, although 3D, has ditched its free-roaming camera and instilled a fixed-angle view, although you can still zoom in and out. This has obviously been done for gameplay reasons (so you don't get lost while you're swirling around) but its looks suffer accordingly.

And, the problem we have with *EE* is not purely aesthetic. You'll often find yourself swirling your mouse round to look behind buildings, only to remember that you can't. Almost imperceptibly, 'true' 3D has become as important to gameplay as it has to aesthetic prowess, and while it's not an insurmountable problem in *EE*'s case, it's certainly jolting for the first few hours of play. The only redeeming feature in this particular area is the ability to zoom in very close to units so you can see the amount of detail on them. This is more or less a novelty feature however since you never actually play the game from this viewpoint, and unless you want to play the game with no clue what the enemy is doing,

Takes you from prehistoric times through to modern times and beyond, covering every stage of evolution along the way

game called *Civilization* which is arguably the most original and addictive game ever created. Over the years it's lost some of its appeal with the arrival of a legion of real-time-strategy games which came on the scene, spilled *Civ*'s pint and threw sand in its turn-based face. However, while RTS games are undoubtedly more exciting than their turn-based counterparts, they have never managed to display the sheer depth and complexity of the mighty *Civilization*. *Civ*'s graphical simplicity allowed it to give gamers a huge and diverse amount of choices

way. It's mighty ambitious, and the developers have not skimped in terms of diversity of units and technology as you are taking on a massive tour through human history. You'll discover the obligatory mass slaughter along the way that only the human race would ever think of imposing upon itself at every opportunity.

In terms of look and feel, you will be on familiar ground right from the moment you load up the game and dive into the prehistoric era. It looks and feels like *Age Of Empires*, largely because it's been designed by the same guy who

A prophet takes out an enemy building with an earthquake.

There are plenty of naval units in the game, but you can win without them, like we did.

Take out enemy airports as soon as you spot them or you'll be in a lot of bother.

This library reveals all enemy buildings on the map.

TIME TRAVEL

There are 12 main epochs in the game, and they all bring with them new units and technologies. It seems a little easy at times to get from one era to the next, particularly if you have ample resources, but it's always exciting when it happens and you get new toys to play with. Here are some of the epochs you will find in the game.

This is where it all begins. First things first, get a scout dog and look for food.

In the Bronze Age you can create a granary and no longer have to hunt or forage for food.

Horses come into play in the Middle Ages, and upgrades feature units on horseback.

At last, lots of units with guns. In the Imperial Age too, whenever that was.

Cannons and Elite guards make an appearance, amongst other things.

Note how the graphics change to reflect the time period. Very nice.

World War II. And here's a few Sherman tanks I made earlier.

Look, you're in the future now, with robots and everything.

you will play with the camera zoomed as far out from the landscape as you can get. Apparently, a 3D camera is fully supported in the code but didn't make it into the final product. Technically then, *EE* does itself no favours. However, once you get beyond the game's technical limitations, there is much to enjoy.

Futuristic battles are particularly impressive.

TIME TRAVEL

At its core, *EE* is basically a very simplistic real-time strategy game. Build, explore, fight, it really is that simple. Unlike most games of this ilk however, *EE* takes you through many eras of time, and the units and buildings you create all change to reflect the time period you are playing in. As was the case with *AOE*, there are only

a few resources to collect in the game: wood, stone, iron, gold and food. All these resources are needed to create your buildings and units, and in time-honoured

conclusion with futuristic warfare and you pretty much have *EE* in a nutshell. For this reason, it's supremely playable and totally engrossing for the length of time

latter – Ed). There is no doubt that if you like real-time strategy games, you will not be at all disappointed in *EE*, but unless you want to play with the pre-defined scenarios and campaigns once you finish the game 'proper', you may feel a little short-changed at the length of time it takes you to complete it. That said, *Empire Earth* is a very solid RTS with a huge amount of depth and variety in terms of units and buildings. Even if you only play it for a couple of days just to get through all the different epochs, it's worth the asking price for that alone. **PCZ**

> ## Either we are unbeatable at strategy games, or the designers made it too easy to upgrade from one epoch to the next

RTS tradition, you will find yourself collecting these resources while at the same time attempting to crush your opposition with military units. It's a winning formula, and in *EE* it's a much more appealing one since you get a mind-boggling selection of units to play around with. From prehistoric times right through to the Nano age, you will get what at times seems to be an endless supply of new vehicles and ground units of all shapes and sizes. Imagine *AOE* taken way past its four epochs to its logical

you spend playing it. Our only reservation is its long-term appeal. We went from the first epoch right through to the end of the game in just two days, at two different difficulty levels. Either we are unbeatable at strategy games, or the designers made it too easy to upgrade from one epoch to the next (I suspect the

IN PERSPECTIVE

Age Of Empires 2 is still a great game and basically has a lot more style than *Empire Earth*, but does lack its depth. *Ground Control* is fully 3D and sacks resource management in favour of tactics. Basically, you can't go wrong with any of these three games.

Empire Earth

Age Of Empires 2

Ground Control

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor Pentium II 350 **Memory** 64Mb **WE SAY** 128Mb RAM is essential if you want to get the most out of it

PCZVERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Covers all crucial eras in the history of mankind • Mind-boggling variety of units and buildings • Great sound effects throughout

⬇ **DOWNERS** Impressive but nothing we haven't seen and played before • Irritating AI • Too easy to complete

80
Excellent while it lasts, which is not as long as we would have liked

THEY'LL NEVER GET IT RIGHT

Real-time strategy games and artificial intelligence have co-existed uncomfortably ever since the genre began. The age-old problem of having units go everywhere except where you tell them to go is alive and well in *Empire Earth*. Worse still, they often stand around doing nothing at all while the enemy is blowing your town to bits, so you have to take control of them yourself to get them to take action. This problem is not exclusive to *Empire Earth*, it's true of most RTS games on the market. Given how long this genre has been in existence, you have to wonder if developers will ever get this aspect of their games right. Our hopes are not high.

IN YOUR WORLD
ARE YOUR PEOPLE AHEAD OF THEIR TIME?

CIV III allows you to create breathtaking 'wonders of the world', bringing splendour and grandeur to your civilization. Build The Pyramids, The Great Wall or The Sistine Chapel, make vital scientific breakthroughs such as discovering a cure for cancer. Set an example to the World.

Crucial strategic decisions will be yours in CIV III - the game that tests your worldly judgement.

SID MEIER'S
CIVILIZATION III
MORE CIV THAN EVER
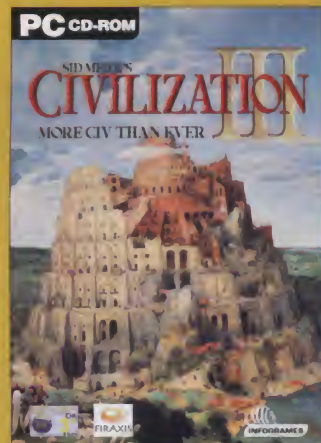
www.civ3.com

FIFA FOOTBALL 2002

⭐ £29.99 • EA Sports • Out now

Yet another *FIFA* game, yet another disappointment for *Steve Hill*

I f you've been following the progress of this, you may be aware that EA Sports has been claiming to have "reinvented the beautiful game." It's a bold boast, given that previous incarnations of *FIFA* have been little more than seasonal updates, not to mention special editions to coincide with international tournaments. However, we can now finally confirm that *FIFA 2002* is completely different to last year's effort. Yep, Paul Scholes has been taken off the box and replaced by Thierry Henry.

PASS AND MOVE

As for the game, there have admittedly been a couple of tweaks. The biggest change is in the passing, with the introduction of what EA is describing as an innovative new system. Here's how it works. You've got the ball and you wish to pass it to a teammate. You point the player in possession in the general direction of the intended recipient and press the pass button. Depending on how long you press the button, the ball goes vaguely in the direction of your teammate who then has to run to retrieve it. This is supposed to be a good thing. In practice it isn't, as there are numerous occasions when a ball to feet is exactly what is required, rather than some kind of distorted through ball.

For sure, having players make runs and attempting to hit the ball into space is one aspect

> ❝A contrary mix of immaculate production values and murky gameplay, with the ball behaving like a balloon full of rice pudding❞

of football, but it is basically a simple game where the easy ball is often the best option. *FIFA 2002* fails to recognise this, and with this new implementation, the game will continue to irk the purist, while now having the added bonus of confusing its key audience, the casual gamer.

SPEED FREAK

A further change concerns the speed boost, which can now be achieved by holding down a button instead of tapping it furiously like in *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*. However, the tapping option is still available, giving greater speed than the holding method and thereby rendering it pointless.

FIFA 2002 is the usual contrary mix of immaculate production values and murky gameplay, with the ball again behaving like a balloon full of rice pudding.

Naturally it looks superb, and while the player likenesses may not hold up in a court of law, you can at least have an educated guess as to their identity.

New competitions include World Cup qualification, although the finals are excluded so that you can shell out again for *World Cup 2002* in six months' time.

Ultimately, *FIFA 2002* isn't fit to lace the boots of the *ISS* series, sadly unavailable on PC. Someone once said that not only was Ringo Starr not the best drummer in the world, he wasn't even the best drummer in The Beatles. By the same token, *FIFA 2002* certainly isn't the best football game in the world. It isn't even the best *FIFA* game. 🖳

Who says Fowler and Owen don't get on? They're practically inside each other.

The search for the contact lens continued.

1st GOAL   16   Heskey   England

Sponsorship? What sponsorship?

Thierry Henry, or Terry 'Enry as he's known in North London.

INPERSPECTIVE

FIFA games have always been criticised for being identical year after year. This time, it seems that they have bucked the trend by actually making this one worse.

FIFA 2002	
FIFA 2001	
EURO 2000	
FIFA 2000	

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P200 MMX **Memory** 32Mb **ALSO REQUIRES** 4Mb 3D card **WE SAY** PII 300, 64Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card

PCZVERDICT

⊕ **UPPERS** Hundreds of teams • Reasonable player likenesses • Variety of competitions • Decent commentary
⊖ **DOWNERS** Leaden ball dynamics • Unsuccessful innovations • Seen it all before • Poor player positioning

63 It's just not football

STRONGHOLD

⭐ £29.99 • Take 2 • Out now

Rhianna Pratchett gets out her bucket and spade

Defending small areas can be tricky.

Battle your way through 21 military campaign missions.

The new Sunday market reported brisk trading.

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

A nyone that's ever had Lego knows the subtle thrill of building something. What brother hasn't had to explain to his younger sister that Barbie, Murdock from *The A-Team* and assorted household pets do not belong in medieval fortresses or intergalactic space stations? What sister hasn't then kicked down a few ramparts in disgust at their sibling's lack of imagination? Firefly Studios' latest title *Stronghold* is about to revive all those feelings.

Halfway between a city building sim and an RTS,

Stronghold focuses around the building and maintenance of a castle. As with most games of this ilk, you start off with something along the lines of a garden shed, encourage a few local peasants in, and end up with something that would make Gormenghast look poky. Although the emphasis is rather more on defence than aggression, the gameplay is hardly original. Nor is the concept for that matter, although we're dredging the early '90s here, when Quicksilver Studios produced their *Castle* series and Stormfront Studios (*Pool of Radiance: Ruins Of Myth Drannor*) released a DOS-based AD&D strategy game, involving the building and maintenance of a stronghold called, unsurprisingly, *Stronghold*.

Firefly's *Stronghold* is divided between campaigns, military and economic missions (some

of which include attacking or defending pre-built historical castles), free build and multiplayer options. The military campaigns in particular (which see you battling against four tyrants – the Rat, the Pig, the

brewers preparing their latest batch of ale. Every man, woman, child and creature is named and by clicking on them you can find out what they're up to and their feelings about your performance. There are also delicious little

> **❝All your peasants want is food and drink, low taxes and somewhere to go and be pious❞**

Snake and the Wolf) are well structured and the half-decent character animation actually gives you the feeling that you're fighting a real foe, rather than just a few computer sprites.

DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS
The attention to graphical detail is an especially strong feature. Each building slides open to reveal the workings inside – bakers baking bread, fletchers making bows and

details like the hunter's dogs who chase chickens and the little headless ghost that sometimes wanders round your castle. When you get a good-sized castle up and running, it's a genuine pleasure to watch.

Your peasants are simple folk – all they want is food and drink, low taxes and somewhere to go and be pious after they cop off with the buxom wench at the local. Provide those in adequate

supply and they'll pretty much toddle on with their daily lives. You can affect the morale and productivity slightly by placing 'nice' things around your castle, like pretty gardens, a maypole or a dancing bear, that make people happy but lazier. Alternatively you can instil terror by erecting torture devices (a chopping block or heads on spikes) that make your peasants more productive but fearful. I was disappointed to see that while the 'nice' stuff often had animation you couldn't actually select an unwary peasant and send him to meet Mr Axe.

There isn't quite the same level of inter-dependence as *Zeus: Master Of Olympus* or *Caesar III*, simply because in *Stronghold* it's about micro-micro-economics – you're only thinking about the basic needs of maybe a few hundred, but certainly not

"Your mother was a hamster and your father smelt of Elderberries."

thousands of people. There isn't so much of a sense that A needs X, Y and Z otherwise they decay/under-produce. What little there is in this vein of gameplay, is generally confined to the more economically-based missions. In these instances the ideas are fairly simple: build wells otherwise your castle will be overwhelmed by fire or go and kill some bunnies so they don't eat your crops. Other events such as the blighting of your wheat fields or the mysterious disease effecting your cows, are not clearly linked to what you are doing or not doing, making you feel like you're rather at the mercy of the whims of the game.

HIDE AND SEEK

The actual building of your castle and army is fairly easy to pick up and relies on your stock of stone, wood, pitch and iron. Unfortunately as your fortifications get larger, the fact that there is no real level

of transparency in the buildings means it's incredibly difficult to see troops behind them, and more importantly holes in your wall, unless you constantly click the four-point rotation button.

Having said all this, *Stronghold* is far more advanced militarily than the likes of *Zeus* and both attacking and defending even in the early stages of the game, is very challenging. Again there's a lot of thought gone into the military details, including the Pythonesque way you can "Fetchez la vache" and catapult rotting cow carcasses into your enemy's castle. However, formations are very limited and there is no fog of war, which makes for a slightly different style of play, especially in the multiplayer games.

Stronghold has obviously set out to plunder the best bits of the current crop of real-time strategy/sim-build games and for the most part, it does a bloody good job. It's not perfect and it still adheres to the regimented rules inside its own little world. But once you get inside that world it really is Lego heaven. [PCZ]
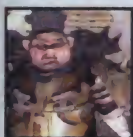
KNOW YOUR ENEMY
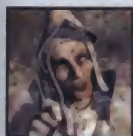
THE RAT
The first of the four tyrants you encounter. Sneaky and spiteful, but get him on the run and he'll squeak for mercy. Beware his more powerful friends who don't scare so easily.
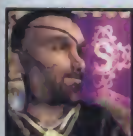
THE SNAKE
The Edmund Black Adder of the bunch. He'll side with the other tyrants, but as soon as you scare him, you won't see him for dust. Besiege his castle to take this one down.
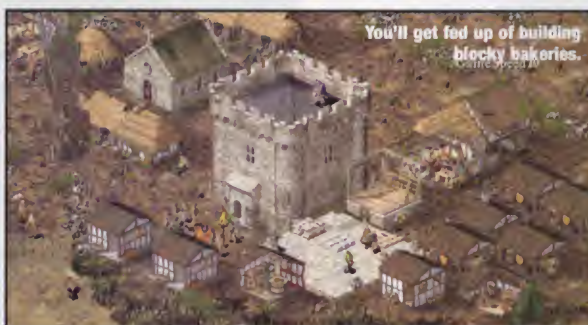
THE PIG
Ugly and tough, and big on torture and pain. The Pig favours big overpowering armies that will try and storm your fortifications, so you'll need to take advantage of any high ground.

THE WOLF
The toughest and smartest of the bunch, the Wolf is strong, powerful and cunning. You'll need to make full use of everything you've learnt and your full armoury to destroy him.

You'll get fed up of building blocky bakeries.

Fires in your castle can be devastating.

The snake may act tough but once you break into his castle he's a complete wuss.

A healthy castle is a thing of beauty.

IN PERSPECTIVE

It's a close call but *Stronghold* is a slightly better all-round game than *Zeus*, although if you favour more complicated micro-economic webs you can't go wrong with *Caesar III*. If you'd still rather have skyscrapers than castles, go for *SimCity 3000*.

STRONGHOLD

ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS

CAESAR III

SIMCITY 3000

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P300 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 8 x CD ROM **WE SAY** Ran fine on a PII350, but go for a PIII 500 and 128Mb

PCZ VERDICT

⊕ UPPERS Incredible detail • Challenging missions • Easy to pick up • You get to build big things

⊖ DOWNERS No fog of war option • Limited viewpoint • Seiges are too quick

84 Medieval Lego

IL-2 STURMOVIK

⭐ £34.99 • Ubi Soft • Out November 29

It's better to be down here wishing you were up there, than up there wishing you were down here. *Daniel Emery gets all profound with aviation and IL-2 Sturmovik*

Z PCZONE CLASSIC

T he German air traffic controllers at Frankfurt are infamous for being a short-tempered bunch. They expect you to know exactly where you are supposed to park the plane (and how to get there without any assistance). So when the following conversation between a British Airways 747 (call sign Speedbird 192) and the air traffic control was allegedly overheard, it rapidly became the stuff of aviation folklore.

The story goes that the pilot of Speedbird 192 began with the usual greeting: "Good morning Frankfurt, Speedbird 192, clear of the active." To which, the German air traffic controllers replied equally politely: "Guten Morgen, taxi to your gate."

So far, all is going smoothly. The BA 747 pulled onto the main taxiway and suddenly stops. Noticed by the air traffic controllers, they enquired brusquely: "Speedbird, do you not know where you are going?"

The pilot replied: "Standby ground, I'm looking up the gate location now." At this, the air traffic controllers clearly became irritated and said: "Speedbird 192, have you never been to Frankfurt before?" Coolly, the BA pilot responded: "Yes, several times in 1944, but I didn't stop."

We used this story as a kind of pithy introduction, because as 99.9 per cent of us will never fly into Frankfurt (or work for British Airways) we have no way of knowing if this story is actually true or not, but it just sounds too good not to be. And the same is true with most flight sims. Unless you are stupidly rich, you will probably never fly a Spitfire, Me109 or any other vintage WWII aircraft. So when games companies state that 'this sim has the most realistic flight physics to date' we really have no way of knowing if the claims are actually true. All you can rely on is gut feel.

So, as WWII flight sims go, *IL-2 Sturmovik* just feels 'right'. From the outset, you've got an intro sequence that isn't some pre-rendered poxy avi, but a pseudo-authentic black-and-white trailer utilising the games engines. A developer has to be very confident in their game, or just have enormous gall. We'd hazard a guess that the Russian developers probably fall into the former category.

Troops flee from burning vehicles.

> **It may be a flight sim addict's wet dream, but to the novice it's a total nightmare**

WOT NO YANKS?

The most obvious thing that strikes you watching the intro is the total absence of RAF, USAF or Japanese planes. For this is a game set in a theatre of WWII that has been largely ignored by both Hollywood and the games industry alike: the Eastern Front (apart from *Enemy At The Gate*, but that was a British production). This mammoth struggle between Nazi Germany and Communist Russia was totally unlike any war previously fought. With 20 million Germans and over 30 million Russians losing their lives in the conflict from 1941-45, it puts the 300,000 British and 320,000 American casualties in the shade. But from 1945 until Gorby and Glasnost, the USSR was the big bad enemy of the West, and so both history books and the media have to some extent marginalised them. But we digress.

Railtrack would like to apologise to customers for the late arrival of the 17.45.

Ground strafing gives you an adrenaline kick like no other.

Getting close to the bomber's defensive guns can really spoil your day.

SPD 270
ALT 1950
HDG 128

Power: 100%

This is One, Bombs away!
This is Two, Bombs away!
This is Four, Bombs away!
This is Three, Bombs away!
This is One, Target on fire! Direct hit!
This is Four, Direct hit! Target destroyed!
This is Two, Direct hit! Target destroyed!
This is Three, Direct hit! Target destroyed!
Vector 120.
Height 01.

A German airfield takes a pounding.

SECRETS OF THE WAR

As everyone knows Germany lost WWI. And WWII. And the 1966 World Cup. But stereotypical insults aside, the Nazi regime were a talented bunch when it came to the art of developing new weapons of war. The most ambitious of these was the proposed flying wing Amerika Bomber called the Ho XVIII B. It was estimated that the Ho XVIII B would have a range of 11,000km (6,835 miles), a service ceiling of 16km (52,492 feet) a payload of 4,000lbs and a round-trip endurance of 27 hours. In addition, the thin design of the plane made it virtually invisible to enemy radar, so it could take off from Germany and fly undetected to Washington, drop its bombs and return to the Fatherland. And this was in 1944. Luckily for the Allies, the plane only made one test flight before the war ended. However, the plane may have gone but it wasn't forgotten. The only example of this aircraft lies at the Smithsonian Institute in America, and during the late 1980s a team from Lockheed paid a secret visit. It wasn't until the public saw the B-2 Stealth Bomber that its inspiration (and much of its design) became public knowledge. Imagine how the world would be today if the Stealth Bomber had flown in 1944. It nearly happened.

The Ho XVIII B, which was developed in 1944.

The B-2 Stealth Bomber. Notice any similarities?

So you've watched the intro with your joystick in hand, now what? Well, unless you are a serious propellerhead with gun camera footage in the VCR and a copy of *Sagittarius Rising*, you'd better turn all the settings right down. Because *IL-2 Sturmovik* drops you right in at the deep end with a very realistic flight model.

The full monty's there from propeller pitch (the angle of attack of the propeller) through to blackouts and aircraft trim. It may be a flight sim addict's wet dream, but to the novice it's a total nightmare. Thankfully, if this is all too daunting, you can go into a sandbox mode where the plane virtually flies itself. As you gain a little more confidence, you can

turn the realism settings up until the plane flies the same way a brick doesn't. Don't worry, it all comes with practice.

A NOVICE NO MORE

So let's assume you've mastered the basics: stick goes back – houses get smaller; stick goes forward – houses get bigger. You're then thrown into either a quick fix fight, or a full career ladder. The dogfight mode lets you pick up to 28 aircraft (12 enemy, and 15 friendly) and lets you duke it out in the sky. Or, if you want to practice your air-to-ground skills you can go tankbusting, bridge-breaking or just try to sink some of the local shipping. No mean feat as the

Chalk up one to the good guys.

Proof you should never go for a long drive after a night of curry and lager.

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

So you want some more, do you?

There are two extra goodies that come with *IL-2*. The first of these is the full mission builder, which allows you to set up everything from an entire battlefield to the smallest AA emplacement. While setting up the defence of Berlin may look simple on paper, it's a fine line between setting up something that's too easy, or downright impossible. Fun, but not something for the novice. The other feature of *IL-2* is the ability to add new skins to the game. In the same way that most FPSs let you change the look and feel of the characters, so too can you change the look (but not the feel) of the aircraft. The *IL-2* site (www.il2sturmovik.com/) has a number of new skins to download, and if you're feeling brave, 3D Max have released a cut-down version for free so you can create your own. Gmax is available at www.discreet.com/products/gmax/gmaxconsumer/index.html

INPERSPECTIVE

We can't praise this game enough. If there was ever a game to rekindle anyone's interest in WWII flight sims, then this is it. From cutting-edge graphics through to realistic sound effects and atmosphere you could carve with a machete, *IL-2 Sturmovik* will have you tugging your joystick like a pubescent boy in a nudist camp. What more could you want from a game?

IL-2 Sturmovik

WarBirds III

WarBirds II

Aces High

Combat Flight Sim II

enemy, unsportingly, tends to shoot back.

If you're into collecting medals, awards and generally being somebody's bish then the campaign mode is where you'll have the most fun. Starting off as a grunt and 'obayink orderz', you start off with a series of basic

66 Propellers bend, bits fall off the wing and fire has a terminal effect on your flying ability 99

missions (take off, fly in a circle, shoot something and land) progressing in rank until you call the shots, leading your flight to certain doom against overwhelming odds (at least if you're playing the Germans).

But what sets this flight sim head and shoulders above the rest isn't just the unusual setting and aircraft. There are subtleties

everywhere, which you're not really aware of but add one hundredfold to the atmospherics. As you sit on the airfield, you can just make out the sound of an air raid siren in a town a few miles away and as the sound drifts over, it's mi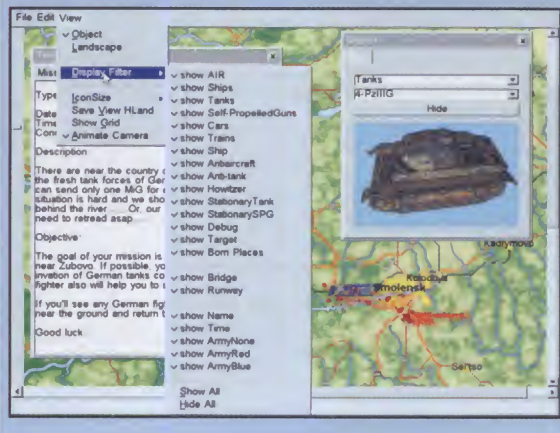xed with the sound of distant anti-aircraft fire. It feels like something out of a film. Even when you're in combat, you can hear the engines of other planes if you get too close and the chattering of machine guns when you're buzzing the troops. Utterly fantastic.

The planes also damage in a very realistic manner. Gone are the old 'broken in a perfect line' models that every other flight sim

has. Now propellers bend, bits fall off the wing (but you can still stay up) and fire has a terminal effect on your flying ability.

HOWEVER...

But while this is the best flight sim we've ever seen, it's not quite the Holy Grail. There are still many aircraft, which are in the game, but are non-flyable by humans. The German side only has the Me109 and Fw190 planes for human control. All the bombers are in drone mode only, and the legendary Me110 is nowhere to be seen. While there is talk of an add-on pack to activate these aircraft in the future, for the here and now it just isn't happening.

The tutorials are also somewhat flawed. They start off talking you through the basics and telling you what to do, and it's only after five minutes of banging the keyboard and swearing that you realise that they are nothing more than film trailers using the game engine. Not interactive, and not usable. A bit of an own goal there.

But these are tiny flaws in a jar of otherwise perfect aviation ointment. Not since *Secret Weapons Of The Luftwaffe* have the flight sim community got so

worked up (and that was a classic). With the exception of *WarBirds III* (which still has a long way to go before it can be called anything other than public beta) there isn't a sim out there that comes close to *IL-2 Sturmovik*. If you only buy one flight sim in your life, then buy this. You know it makes sense. **PCZ**

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 400 **Memory** 128Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 16Mb 3D card (Voodoo3 at least or equal) **WE SAY** PIII 600 or better, 256Mb RAM. You're also going to need a 32Mb 3D card at the very least

PCZVERDICT

① UPPERS Superb atmospherics, sound and visuals • Smart AI • Lots of variety in ground and air targets • Dogfights can become tense and occasionally downright scary

② DOWNERS You can't fly all of the game's planes • Overly long load-up times for missions • Very steep learning curve

90 It doesn't get much better than this

TENNIS MASTERS SERIES

⊕ £24.99 • Microids • Out now

Martin Korda, a tennis master? He cannot be series

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Here's an interesting one. Amid EA's inevitable winter releases of the latest versions of *FIFA* and *NHL*, Microids has decided to strike back with… a tennis game. Still you never know, it might work. On the one hand, it's a refreshing throw back to a more salubrious season, when over enthusiastic rich kids would queue overnight outside Wimbledon, before wiling away their skived-off-day, spending their hard earned inheritance on criminally overpriced strawberries and desperately hoping someone vaguely British would win a game. On the other hand, *Tennis Masters Series* is a superb simulation, with unparalleled realism and detail, which portrays the sport in an entertaining and easily accessible way. Something few other PC tennis games have managed to achieve.

THREE HORSE RACE
The obvious comparisons are with Cryo's *Rolland Garros French Open 2001* and *Open Tennis 2000*, the key difference being with the control interface. Whereas Cryo's efforts aided you with the movement of your player, letting you concentrate on shot placement, *Tennis Masters Series* charges you with controlling both your player's movement and the execution of your next shot, which means copious amounts of desperate swiping at the ball like an epileptic trapped in a wasps nest until you get to grips with it. However, although challenging at first, once mastered, the system is pretty intuitive, and before long you'll find yourself diving heroically for shots, and pulling off stunning cross-court passes, although sadly it's very difficult to track lobbed shots due to the fixed camera angle, and you often find yourself literally chasing shadows.

By far *Tennis Masters Series'* strongest feature, is its AI. It's somewhat of a novel feeling to have your AI controlled opponent not only return a deep, fast serve, but actually totally wrong foot you with its return. After the idiotic opponents of *RGFO2001*, who could be defeated in well under three hours, you're suddenly hit by the realisation that this isn't going to be nearly as easy. The hardest level is seriously challenging, especially against the top players out of the 67 opponents (all with various attributes and playing styles) on offer. Unfortunately there are still instances where they simply stand and watch the ball bounce in front of them like gormless simpletons, and generally, the AI is overly susceptible to drop shots.

> **❝Occasionally the players move like they've been involved in a hideous accident involving the Mafia and their kneecaps❞**

ALL IN THE PHYSICS
Things are improved further by hugely accurate ball, court and player physics. Play on clay and you're best bet is baseline hammering, and careful shot placement will have your opponent skidding like mad on the court surface, and unable to recover in time to get to the ball. Crowd sounds, player reactions, some great replays and even incorrect line calls add to the overall atmosphere, although the graphics are fairly standard and occasionally the players move like they've recently been involved in a hideous accident involving the Mafia and their kneecaps.

If you're only going to buy one sport game this Christmas, make it this one. Unless you don't like tennis, in which case buy one of the other ones, obviously. It may not have the big brand name of EA's mammoth titles, but to its credit, it's not only entertaining, but hugely challenging to boot.

Although it's far from perfect (there are no grass courts due to the restrictions of the *Tennis Masters Series* licence), and while the multiplayer games aren't nearly as hysterically squit-in-your-pants entertaining as *RGFO2001*'s and *OT2000*'s, it's still the best PC tennis game to date, as its superb AI has managed to push it just ahead of its Cryo counterparts. But only just. **PCZ**

Play singles or doubles on a variety of courts.

Ball, court and player physics are spot on.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 350 **Memory** 64Mb **ALSO REQUIRES** 16Mb 3D Card **WE SAY** PIII 450 with 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

PCZ VERDICT

🔼 **UPPERS** Superb AI • Excellent physics • Very Challenging • Fun multiplayer action • Good replays • Huge variety of opponents

🔽 **DOWNERS** Occasionally quirky AI • Can be hard to track high balls • Umpire sounds like a paedophile • Some strange player movement • No online play • No grass courts

82 Advantage Microids

POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR

⭐ £34.99 • Ubi Soft • Out now

Traditional role-playing returns to the PC. *Chris Anderson* is here to greet it

I doubt many of you will remember the original game in this series. It appeared at a time when SSI was literally churning out dozens of titles in this genre, all of them more or less identical save for minor differences in plot and characters. *Pool Of Radiance* was one of the better ones, and so remains in the minds of hardcore veterans who have been with the RPG genre from the beginning. This, the sequel, bears no resemblance whatsoever to the original. Visually, obviously, it's far superior, but in terms of game mechanics it plays exactly how you would expect any new RPG to play. Think *Baldur's Gate 2* and you have the right idea. It's all about forming a party of adventurers from classic RPG classes, such as warriors, palladins, wizards etc, and venturing forth to kill whatever comes your way, and solve a few quests while you're at it.

There's nothing particularly wrong with that, it's a tried and tested formula, and I am sure the creators of *Pool Of Radiance II* must have been thinking: 'If it's good enough for *Baldur's Gate*, it's good enough for us, right?'. Not quite.

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU DO...

...it's how you do it, and *Pool Of Radiance II* takes an almost casual approach to every aspect of its gameplay. The quests are passable, but designed in a way that dictates you only come across quest objects or characters by chance when you're wading through a dungeon. Your journal keeps a list of all the quests you currently have assigned, but by the time you get to them, you will have completely forgotten what they were about as they seem sort of lumbered in with everything else you have to do while you're hacking your way through one monster after another. This gives a general feeling of simply going through the motions, rather than actively pursuing quests in order to get to the bottom of whatever comedy disaster is going on in each one of them.

Visually, *Pool Of Radiance II* is nothing to write home about. In fact, compared to games such as *Baldur's Gate 2* it looks decidedly unpolished. The graphics are more functional than inspirational, which would appear to be an indication that the games' designers are relying heavily on the gameplay to carry the title. This in itself is not a criticism if the gameplay rises above the norm, but in the case of *PRII* what you see is literally what you get, and there are no surprises or innovations in terms of game mechanics. If you have played any of the big-name turn-based RPGs, you have played *PRII*. It does't have the wildly imaginative sub-plots or dark humour of *Planescape: Torment*. It does not have the style and panache of *Baldur's Gate 2*. It does not have the combination of themes seen in *Arcanum*. What it does have, however, is combat, and lots of it.

FIGHTING TALK

It is perhaps more like *Icewind Dale* than *Baldur's Gate*, in that it relies heavily on relentless combat to carry it along. Virtually

Another day, another dungeon.

roll 12, bonus 19, target AC 13, combat t
damage 0, remaining HP 8
roll 2, bonus 1 spell level 3, caster media

> **As has become the norm with these games, *Pool Of Radiance II* offers a variety of speeds at which the play out the combat**

Great spell effects save battles from total tedium.

saving throw 8, bonus 11 spell level 3, caster media
formula saving throw rolls 11

Thankfully, there are plenty of outdoor areas to explore.

A lightning bolt introduces itself to several baddies.

I told you not to stand over there.

DAMAGE LIMITATION

You will find that more often than not you are heavily out-numbered in battle sequences. Given that your melee fighters are almost bound to miss their target 80 per cent of the time, while the enemy monsters hit with annoying regularity, there are only two tactics guaranteed to get you through battles with any vague degree of success. The first is simple: if you have a cleric and you are fighting undead, use 'turn undead' to wipe out the majority of opponents, the rest of the battle is then a cinch. The second: if you have a cleric in your party and there are no undead opponents, use the cleric spell 'hold person' to keep monsters at bay so your melee fighters can deal with them one by one. In short: make sure you have a cleric, got it?

Prevention is always better than cure in turn-based RPGs.

everywhere you go you'll be fighting something or other along the way. As has become the norm with these games, *PRII* offers a variety of speeds at which to play out the combat, but as ever, only turn-based combat really works effectively since your party will get slaughtered if you don't take control of them and tell them what to do. This is typical of games based on the AD&D ruleset. You can't have a genuine real-time RPG with this system, so turn-based combat is what you're going to get, like it or not.

This has its advantages: it makes for a more strategic approach to battles and forces you to think before you act. It also has its drawbacks: it can, at times, be mind-numbingly boring. That's not to say *PRII* is a bad game. It's perfectly playable in an almost mindless way and even proves addictive at times, particularly when your characters get to a reasonable level and have better spells that make a real difference in combat. It's fair to say though, that casual gamers will get nothing out of this game, and needless to say, if you're not a fan of the genre, this is not the title that will convert you. If you are a hardcore RPG veteran, you will find it perfectly playable and enjoyable, and will get weeks of gameplay out of it (it's a big game). Otherwise, steer clear. ■

IN PERSPECTIVE

Pool Of Radiance does what it says on the tin, and absolutely nothing else. *Baldur's Gate 2* is a similar game with much better presentation and plot, and *Planescape: Torment* walks all over it in just about every sense, and it has a sense of humour.

Pool Of Radiance RoMD
▬▬▬▬▬▬

Planescape: Torment
▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

Baldur's Gate 2
▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 400 Memory 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 12Mb 3D card **WE SAY** PII 500, 128Mb RAM

PCZ VERDICT

① UPPERS The biggest dungeons we've seen for some time • Authentic AD&D ruleset • Nice spell effects in places

① DOWNERS Repetitive and tedious combat • Indisuputably beardy, real-time RPG fans you have been warned • Quests are something of an afterthought

65 Harcore RPG fans will love it, everyone else will hate it

The graphics aren't the prettiest we've seen, but they don't affect gameplay.

MONOPOLY TYCOON

Success can hinge on the price of your products.

⬆ The default names are American, but can be changed to English.

⭐ £24.99 • Infogrames • Out November

Mark Hill knows all about money. Now he just needs to get hold of some...

What a filthy, disgusting capitalist society we live in. Take last Christmas' biggest sellers, for instance. *Championship Manager* is all about looking after your bank balance, playing around with transfer fees and ensuring your players' wages are not too high, and as for *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*, the title is explanation enough. But Monopoly is where it all really started, teaching children to love dough as much as mother's milk and preparing us all for the cheating, purse-grabbing world ahead. And while *Monopoly Tycoon* doesn't give you the satisfaction of seeing your mate land on your four-house and two-hotel property, it's still all

about pound signs replacing your pupils. The real soundtrack to the game is the sound of coins falling on one another. And a very nice sound it is, too.

KERCHING!

As you probably already know, this is a very different version of Monopoly than the one we're used to, swapping the turn-based gameplay for fast-paced real-time and the flat surface of a board for a three dimensional city full of people, cars and an avid desire to consume.

Comparisons to *SimCity* are inevitable. It is a simulated city after all. But *Tycoon*'s gameplay is much closer to the classic *Theme*

Park than any city-building god game. Although you can buy blocks, build houses and erect hotels, the game is about opening shops, bars, cinemas and anything else that will get the punters in and spending their money. Instead of the freeform nature of something like *SimCity* or *Caesar III*, *Tycoon* is very much scenario driven, so it's not all about starting from scratch. More importantly, there is no micromanagement whatsoever, beyond setting the prices of the products in each of your shops (which is important when you're trying to outsell an opponent). Each scenario sets out a goal you must achieve before any of your rivals (personifications of the board's playing pieces, with the shoe turning into a cobbler and so on), and which ranges from making a certain amount of money within one day, having the wealthiest empire by a certain year or even becoming mayor.

It can all seem a bit overwhelming at first, especially for people who are more familiar with the traditional Monopoly board game than sophisticated

There are day and night businesses, but everything closes after midnight.

"It's about opening shops, bars cinemas and anything else that gets the punters in"

Mark	Battleship	Shoe
-$752	$5778	$3077
Pulled Out	**Winner**	**Pulled Out**

If you want to buy a block you'll need to bid the highest in an auction.
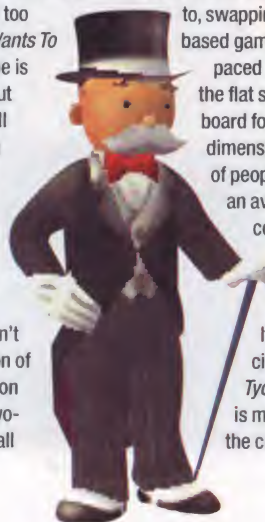
⬆ The people of Monopoly City don't have any real personalities, like they did in *Theme Park*.

⬆ The tutorials are easy to follow and talk you through all the basics.

computer strategy titles. But *Tycoon* does a magnificent job of easing you into the interface and the intricacies of the gameplay, with a set of well designed tutorials and some easy and achievable first scenarios.

TAKE A CHANCE ON ME
Another of the Monopoly staples is also present and correct: the chance cards. They appear every so often in the corner of your screen and, while you don't have

to click on them, the curiosity of seeing if it's a good one or a bad one is irresistible. They're often small rewards (win a £200 inheritance) or slight annoyances (pay a £200 hospital bill), but now and again a card pops up that can turn a game. Perhaps the most dramatic is the bad publicity card, which makes every shop in a targeted block sell next to nothing for a day. Others produce strikes in selected shops or make it easier to take over other's property.

Like most *Theme Park*-style games, *Tycoon* is unbelievably addictive for a short period of time, but it's difficult to imagine yourself playing it for more than a few days at a time. However, like Deep Red's previous game, *Risk II*, it's a title you can keep coming back to at any time for a couple of hours of fun. The game really comes into its own in multiplayer mode, but this suffers from being a bit too slow – you can't speed up the time – particularly if you set up a game against computer controlled opponents.

We're promised add-on packs in the future that will feature loads

more scenarios as well as integrating one of the most recognisable Monopoly elements: the prison. This will also introduce a crime element, which should add some much needed spice to what is a fun, but ultimately too one-dimensional, title. **PCZ**

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P233 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 8Mb video card **WE SAY** A P300 and more memory will prevent slow-down

PCZVERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** No micromanagement • Making money is very addictive • Scenario-based gameplay keeps you on your toes
⬇ **DOWNERS** You need to speed up far too many periods of inactivity • Not something you can play for great periods of time • Needs crime • Chunky graphics

78 Monopoly meets *Theme Park*

IN PERSPECTIVE

The ultimate city tycoon game has yet to be made, but if it's rollercoasters you're after there are a couple of choices (a good one and a bad one). *SimCity* is too dated now.

Monopoly Tycoon

SimCity 3000

Theme Park World

Rollercoaster Tycoon

LIGHTS OUT

Land on Euston Station, pay £500

Although bookshops, pool halls, amusement arcades and cinemas are all alien to the original Monopoly concept, other elements of the board game have been cleverly integrated. Railroads aren't there just so you can get all four of them and make more money every time you pass go. Workers commute from other cities and tourists arrive with a wad of cash burning holes in their pockets. Similarly, the utility properties (Gas, Electricity, Telecom and Water) aren't simple window dressing. Every shop needs electricity (cinemas and arcades more than others), bakers and restaurants use up a lot of gas, diners and cafés get large bills from the water company and travel agencies and doctor's surgeries are among the telephone company's main customers. Owning any of these companies reduces your own cost, which also means other players are paying directly into your pocket. Toasty.

ROGUE SPEAR: BLACK THORN

✪ £29.99 • Publisher Ubi Soft • Out now

Black Thornbirds ahoy – *Tim Ponting* plays the latest *Rogue Spear* episodes

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

T he last outing in the *Rainbow Six/Rogue Spear* camp was the distinctly mediocre *Covert Operations*: just three new single-player missions, no story, a few new weapons, and a daft multimedia guide on 'how to be an anti-terrorist operative'.

> **Gameplay still rocks for creep 'em up fans, though terrorists still behave with the intelligence of fishes**

Thankfully, *Black Thorn* sees the *Rogue Spear* team back on top form, with a set of nine linked single-player missions and six new multiplayer maps.

ANOTHER CRAZED MEGALOMANIAC

The plot is typically tenuous – some nutter with a grudge against Rainbow is copying famous terrorist actions from history. Your job is to find out who he is and ultimately kill him. The nine new missions are almost universally excellent – big maps, and unbelievably difficult to complete at Elite level. There are so many highlights – mission two takes place on a luxury yacht, and has a multi-level galleried choke point with a staircase bang in the middle that has to be traversed to finish the mission. In the fourth jungle outing, you come under attack almost immediately from

patrols. There's an exceptionally hard mission to complete that involves rushing to the top of a tower at the last minute to snipe a bus driver escaping to Somalia. A train bust in Holland has some of the trickiest sniper/team co-ordination ever. Creep through the metal detectors at Mombasa airport in a recreation of Entebbe, and they go off! (This mission was reworked after the events of September 11 to avoid the final confrontation on the plane itself.) In fact, only one mission disappointed, set in a Thai

hospital. Compared with the rest it seemed simple. Especially alongside the final level in Athens, which is near impossible...

ANCIENT ENGINE, GREAT GAME

The *Rogue Spear* engine is looking decidedly long in the tooth, however, especially now our appetites have been whetted by *Max Payne*. Everything is so angular and bare, though the team has done its best with the tools available. In fairness, the character animations are still among the best of any game in this genre. At one point I burst into a room in the Milan mission and the terrorist jumped onto a table, then collapsed on top of it, limbs hanging over its edge. And the sound is fantastically atmospheric.

Gameplay still rocks for creep-'em-up fans, though terrorists still

behave with the intelligence of fishes while being able to pop slugs off like Russian sharpshooters. Which makes it especially satisfying wielding the fabulous new silenced P90 in anger – its rate of fire clears rooms out in pico-seconds. Multiplayer fanatics, on the other hand, will enjoy mowing the opposition down with an M60 machine gun.

If you're a *Rogue Spear* fan waiting for *Ghost Recon* (see page 60), then *Black Thorn* is expensive for what is effectively an add-on pack – but since it includes the complete game engine, you won't need the original to play, making it an attractive purchase for newcomers, especially those without a hugely powerful machine – if you can stomach the dated graphics. **PCZ**

Gold Team pause for a quick dump before entering a warehouse.

Possibly the nastiest open space ever found in *Rogue Spear*: on board a luxury yacht.

The last level features men in fat body armour... and the arch enemy himself.

Snipers have a much tougher time in *Black Thorn*.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor 266 MHz MMX **Memory** 32Mb RAM
ALSO REQUIRES Windows 95/98/Me, 32Mb RAM, 500Mb free hard disk space
WE SAY A Pentium III/Athlon of any speed and GeForce2 or similar 3D card

PCZ VERDICT

➊ **UPPERS** Great mission design • Atmospheric • New weapons • Multiplayer levels
➍ **DOWNERS** Old engine and tired graphics • Dumb terrorists

81 One of the best *Rainbow Six/Rogue Spear* outings

Unlike most American sport games you can play as the British national side.

1st 4:52
GER 0
GBR 2

NHL 2002

JOYPAD 1

GER | GBR
EMOTION METER

When you're alone in front of the goalie the game goes into *Max Payne* bullet-time.

200 PTS

SCORED A GOAL WITH 2 PLAYERS

An emotion metre builds up the crowd's response.

#27 SCOTT NIEDERMAYER
GOAL (1)
ASSISTED BY SYKORA, ELIAS
4:20

⊕ You can't celebrate with a summersault when you're wearing this gear.

NHL 2002

⭐ £29.99 • EA • Out now

"Is it 2002 already?" asks *Mark Hill* before going back to sleep

There is no sport simulation that can accurately represent the real thing, the actual physical experience of playing. This is partly because most of the sports are team efforts, while their game versions require you to control the whole group instead of participating as an individual. But it's mostly because they're third-person abstractions that simulate watching the sport on TV rather than playing it. You can recreate the Normandy landing in an FPS with a remarkable degree of immersion, but everyone knows

playing *FIFA* has nothing to do with having a kick-around in the park. Perversely, this problem works in favour of *NHL*. At its heart, the series isn't much more than a sophisticated and beautiful version of *Pong*. And as most of you won't give a toss about the real sport of ice hockey, that's exactly how you should think of it.

SORE THUMBS
But the *Pong* theory only works if you play it in beginner or easy mode. As soon as you jump up to medium, the gameplay is so fast and bewildering you're reduced to a painful wreck of sore button-pressing thumbs. Sure, there are tactics you can put in use, fancy stick-work with which to dazzle the opposition and a few special

> **❝If you play it in easy mode or happen to have lightning fast reactions and steel reinforced thumbs there is a good game here❞**

moves, but the pace is too frenetic for anything so subtle. You might be able to stop and think in *NBA Live*, but there is no such luxury here. Stand still for a microsecond and you'll be thumped into the middle of next week.

If you play it in easy mode, or happen to have lightning fast

reactions and steel reinforced thumbs there is a good game here. Presentation is second to none and the graphics are phenomenal. If you have a good enough graphics card, the detail on the players, their reflection on the ice and the slick animation will leave you stunned enough to forget about playing for a while. Add to this loads of options, some decent tunes and even beginner's commentary that acts as a tutorial and you can see what a well-presented package this is. Another nice touch is the designation of heroes among your team, so, even though you don't recognise any names and they all get confused in the scrap of the match, you know who your best hitters are.

The biggest problem, as with any EA Sports title, is that it's not really that different from *NHL 2001*. Okay, so now there is crowd

involvement and a new player card feature, but it's not enough to warrant spending another £30. Still, if it's been a few years since you last bought a hockey game, this is undoubtedly the best. **PCZ**

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P300 **Memory** 32Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 3D video card **SUPPORTS WE SAY** A P400 with 64Mb RAM and at least a 16Mb video card
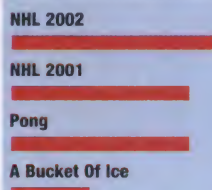
PCZ VERDICT

⊕ **UPPERS** Fantastic presentation • Almost photorealistic graphics • Fun on easy mode
⊖ **DOWNERS** Too frantic • Not different enough • Too much like TV coverage
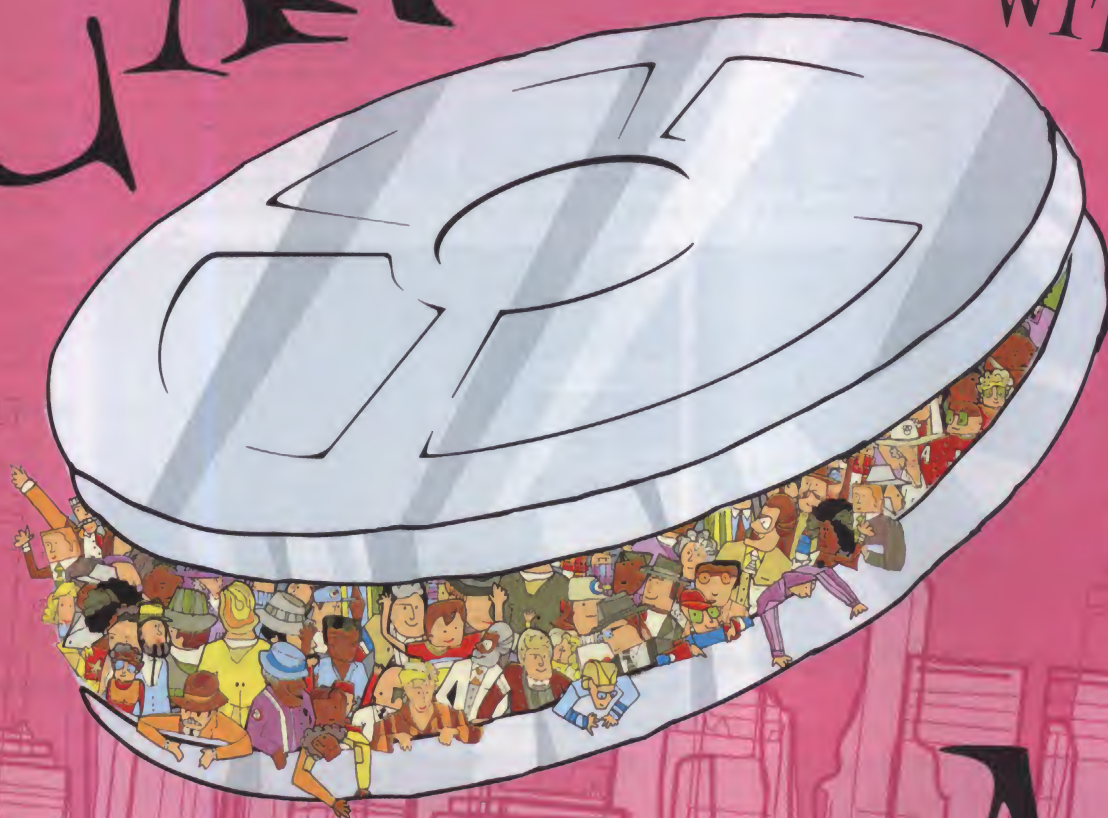
79 Slightly better than the last one, probably not as good as the next one

MICHAEL VAUGHAN'S CHAMPIONSHIP CRICKET MANAGER

⭐ £19.99 • Midas Interactive • Out now

Steve Hill declares this is muck

PCZONE PANTS Whaddya mean, who is Michael Vaughan? A household name in his own home, he is also an up-and-coming Yorkshire and England batting star, or at least that's what the back of the box claims. Another low-rent

release from Midas Interactive, this may be cheap but it's not cheerful, coming as it does with no graphics, no sound and not a great deal of fun. It's the sort of thing that could have been written ten years ago by one man, and indeed it appears to be the work of a

solitary programmer, the title screen carrying the boast 'written and designed by Oli Norwell'. Thanks, Oli.

A hardcore cricket management simulation, it's little more than an exercise in number crunching, with interactivity reduced to picking the team and setting the aggression of the

batsmen and bowlers. The field can also be tampered with, but only to the extent of choosing from five settings. Probably the biggest decision is choosing whether to declare or not.

It's painfully dull stuff, although some of the criticisms levelled at it could also be directed towards *Championship*

Manager, one of the greatest games of all time. Football is far more suited to the management genre though, and it's hard to imagine *MVCCM* engendering anything like the same following. Someone, somewhere will enjoy ploughing through season after season of this, but frankly we don't want to know them.
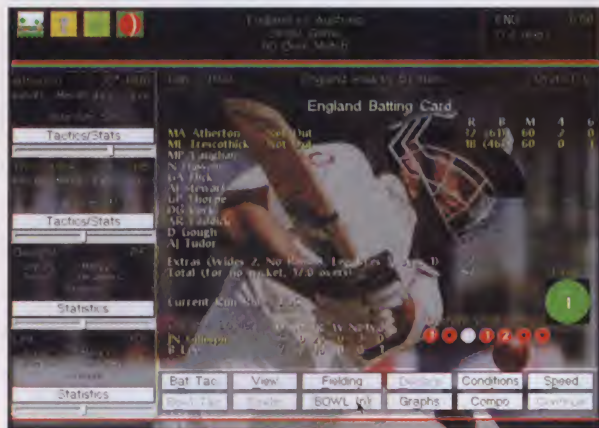
⬆ The tension is bearable. Very, very bearable actually.

⬆ Select length and aggression and that's about all.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P166 **Memory** 16Mb RAM **WE SAY** That should probably do it

PCZ VERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Authentic
⬇ **DOWNERS** Scarcely Interactive • Extremely dull

18 Admirably tedious

GOLF RESORT TYCOON

⭐ £19.99 • Activision • Out now

Golf and strategy rolled into one?

Keith Pullin whacks off

PCZONE PANTS Two months ago my beloved local golf course was demolished to make way for a new retirement home. If there's any justice in the world those responsible for *Golf Resort Tycoon* will be its first residents.

The truth is *GRT* bears absolutely no resemblance whatsoever to golf. Granted, its jocular presentation proves that it was never intended as a serious simulation, but when the cartoon antics allow someone to chip a floating ball off the

surface of a lake into a hole you have to wonder.

As for strategy? Well, that's non-existent too. To establish a thriving resort you simply hire an army of gopher exterminators, add some gardeners, build some driving ranges and watch your coffers swell. Within a few hours you will have seen everything *GRT* has to offer.

But that's not the worst of it. The terrain modify options are awkward and irritating; the hole creation tool is limited to the extent whereby each par is the same length; and finally *GRT* contains more bugs than grass. At one stage I had more than 150 golfers waiting on the 16th tee – maybe they weren't expecting the bunker in the middle of the green.

If you really want to create your own golf course stick to the course architect in *PGA 2000* or keep your fingers crossed for *Sid Meier's SimGolfClub*. Oh, and as a final word of warning, avoid *Ski Resort Tycoon* and *Fast Food Tycoon* too – like *GRT* they're just plain awful.

⬆ Media vans increase the profile of your resort.

⬆ Like this game, this guy's a real floater.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P200 **Memory** 32Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 450Mb free HD Space **WE SAY** P266, 64Mb RAM, 650Mb free HD space

PCZ VERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** First golf resort simulation ever • That's it
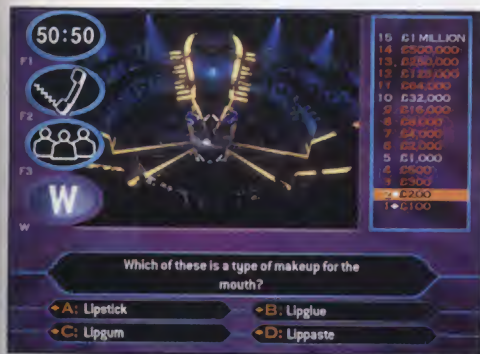⬇ **DOWNERS** Too simplistic • No longevity • Too many bugs • Very, very dull

10 A triple bogey

⬆ Erm, can I take the money Chris?

⬆ No quizmaster, no contestant, just disembodied voices.
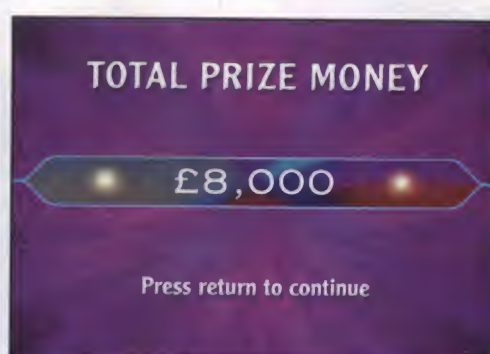
⬆ This is what the whole *ZONE* team together won. Pitiful.

WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE 2ND EDITION

⭐ £24.99 • Eidos • Out now

Dave Woods does, but unfortunately he chose the wrong career path

We quite liked the first edition of *Millionaire*, simply because the progressive question formula works well, as is evident by the continuing success of the TV series. There were huge glaring faults though, not least of which was the piddly amount of questions (1000) and the fact that they were repeated more often than Jeremy Paxman on top form. Unbelievably, with its direct competitor (*Weakest Link*) offering 100,000 questions, the

2nd Edition comes with exactly the same number, and there's still no sign of Chris Tarrant (although he does voice the questions), despite the fact that he makes an appearance in the new PS2 version.

In fact, forgetting the derisory cosmetic enhancements (which amount to the same as me smearing a bit of moisturiser on the end of my nose and trying to make out I'm fit) and the insulting 1000 new questions,

there are only two reasons for buying this. One, to keep your family quiet at Christmas and avoid having to play Go for Broke, Sorry, or any other of the myriad board games that you've kept in your cupboards over the past 20 years. Two, (and this is the deal clincher), the developer has perfected the art of writing your name on the cheque at the end of the game. Last time around the game tried to con you into accepting a slip with the name Player One scrawled on it. I don't know about you but my bank would point and laugh if I

tried to pass this off as one of my own.

So, in conclusion, this is exactly what I thought it would be. Good fun, but in essence a Christmas cash cow for Eidos and Celador, with minimal effort on either side and guaranteed sales of several hundred million units. And you get to pretend to be a television contestant for a

bit. That's it. My parents always said that life wasn't fair and now I'm convinced.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P166 **Memory** 16Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 70Mb hard disk space **WE SAY** That's not too far off

PCZVERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** 1000 questions from the official quizmasters • Questions asked by Chris • Proper names on cheques
⬇ **DOWNERS** Only 1000 questions • No real improvements to the first

59 Docked ten points for lack of effort

SUB COMMAND

⭐ £29.99 • EA • Out now

Richie Shoemaker loves subs, but that's enough about his sexual fantasies

There are better vantage points to watch a war from than sweating in a windowless tin can at the bottom of the ocean, yet with no visual reference, having to rely on instinct, technology and the skill of your comrades, war beneath the waves must certainly be tense. *Sub Command* attempts to capture that tension and like most sub sims over the years it largely succeeds, even if the functional 3D graphics are woeful and far from adequate.

Set in more modern times to Ubi Soft's upcoming *Silent Service 2*, *Sub Command* offers three sub-aquatic conveyances to captain, three campaigns (with some duplication of missions), a mission editor and a number of standalone missions – one of which has you launching Tomahawk missiles at Bin Laden's training camps.

The missions are suitably varied as these things go, ranging from rendezvous, escort, hunter killer or long-range attack, but this being a realistic simulation, few are what you would call exciting. Most of the game is spent simply moving cautiously through the briny, fiddling with sonar settings and cross-referencing data. Actual combat is rather disappointing and in my case I just ended up attacking cargo ships to keep myself awake, which didn't work.

More than most, *Sub Command* is a case of whatever floats your boat. The game is for sub nuts only, as *Train Sim* is for 'spotters and *Flight Sim* for people who like planes. Personally I would much prefer the tension of a WWII sub game, but that's just me. With the is-it-or-isn't-it *Harpoon 4* currently in

stasis, *Sub Command* is certainly the best sub game in circulation; the fact that it's also the only one is slightly more worrying. More than anything else, what *Sub Command* lacks is any real sense of consequence, with no feel for the crew or any sense of loss as your sub sinks to the bottom of the sea.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P233 **Memory** 64Mb **ALSO REQUIRES** 8Mb video card **WE SAY** P300 if you fancy an extra boost

PCZVERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Good interface • Topical • Fairly tense gameplay
⬇ **DOWNERS** 3D visuals • A few bugs • Not for wimps

63 Sub-standard

⬆ The 3D view is dull, dull, dull.

⬆ Flashing lights, dials, buttons – enough to drive you mad.

DRUUNA: MORBUS GRAVIS

⭐ £24.99 • Microids • Out now

There are great games and there are those that are truly unbelievable. *Richie Shoemaker* **finds one of the latter**

PCZONE PANTS

Despite her pneumatic enhancements, the heroine of this comic book-inspired adventure is a fragile petal compared with our Lara. As it says in the manual 'her fragility and apparent naivety are the only weapons at her disposal.' Quite.

The premise behind the game is fair enough: you are a filthy perv scientist. Behind you lays the exposed Druuna, a mysterious girl in a coma, who you must revive by visiting and playing through her memories, revealing how and why she ended up with her breasts exposed and wired up to a computer.

While the back story is faintly intriguing, the game is singularly abysmal. Filling up six CDs and taking about an hour to install, it will take you just half that time to realise that what you have bought is one of the worst adventures ever made. A 3D affair rather than a point-and-click, it is a game where objects are invisible on the scenery, which though thankfully can be picked up after a bit of manoeuvring, can't be used or examined. Worse still, the controls are the most unresponsive we've ever experienced, period. Druuna can only, it seems, walk at the pace of a snail, or hare off across the screen, the latter usually having the result of bumping into a zombie, in which case you die (there's no combat in the game) or falling into a chasm, in which case you die.

There are other problems too, too many for me to go into here. There are very few games I would say this about, but after reading the claims in the manual, that the game is an 'odyssey to match Kubrick's' and 'truly innovative', there is at least one overblown boast that I agree with: 'Unlike any other game ever created,' it says. This is indeed true, for never have I come across such basic, unrefined gameplay, whose only redeeming feature is that it comes on six matching coasters rather than one.

Druuna is a cult comic hero. Popular in France. 'Nuff said.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 400 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 16Mb 3D graphics card **WE SAY** Your PC deserves better

PCZVERDICT

⊙ **UPPERS** Nipples
⊙ **DOWNERS** Pretty much everything else. Even the nipples.

12 A piece of shit

⬆ This is the intro movie. It gets worse.

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100 SWORDS

⭐ £19.99 • Empire • End November

Keith Pullin **gasps open-mouthed at another dose of Japanese weirdness**

At a guess *100 Swords* is best played in its native Japanese because it makes no sense whatsoever in English. The plot and narrative's appalling lack of mastery of the English language makes Chelsea's manager Claudio Ranieri sound like an elocution teacher. That combined with the utterly nonsensical plot, installs *100 Swords* as one of the most surreal games you are ever likely to play on your PC. Make that the most surreal.

Still, if you ignore the language difficulties, its bizarre comic book style, its irritating stereotypical Manga characterisation and atrocious unit pathfinding, there's a relatively decent RTS game here waiting to be loved – by someone. Anyone.

The *Final Fantasy*-type RPG overtones add another layer to the otherwise simplistic gameplay and the graphics engine produces the odd moment of sublime beauty. The sound is well arranged and even the interface is smooth and very easy to get the hang of.

It's basic beyond belief in terms of resource collection and unit creation, but *100 Swords* has a kind of innocent addictive quality that keeps you hooked and dare we say it – even entertained. In fact, if it wasn't for the aforementioned unforgivable hiccups this could almost have been recommendable. As it stands, on weirdness factor alone

Oh dear, looks like trouble ahead.

100 Swords is almost worth buying, but only if you've got serious Yen to burn.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 500 **Memory** 32Mb **ALSO REQUIRES** 600Mb HD space **WE SAY** PIII 800, 64Mb RAM, 1.3GHz HD space and a pretty graphics card

PCZVERDICT

⊙ **UPPERS** Good interface • Some nice graphics
⊙ **DOWNERS** Terrible translation • Awful pathfinding • Nonsense story • Simplistic gameplay

51 Japanese console gibberish

⬆ Chests reward you with resources.

⬆ Casting heat spear on your troops increases their attack rating.

SNOW CROSS

⭐ £19.99 • Wanadoo • Out now

James Lyon goes ski-dooing again. Or something

For those still ignorant of the shoulder-shrugging thrills of *X-Team Racing* ('The best ski-doo game the PC has ever seen!'), it seems like there's competition squeezing itself into that bloated market of motorbikes with planks on. And y'know (not that anyone cares), if you think I marked that first game a little too high at 64 per cent (and sometimes jerk awake after a hectic day lying on the sofa thinking some validation was needed), then here's your validation. Hooray for that.

It's guilty of having the worst catch-up system around. Knock someone off their bike and they'll be back on your tail – and probably overtaking you – scant seconds later. Fall off yourself, or fall victim to your vehicle's poor handling and you'll find yourself near the back quicker than you'll find Posh Spice's new album in the discount barrel. And still able to get to the front in record time.

Start the game and, even in single-race mode, you only get three courses to race on. To unlock the others, you have to win tournaments. And the desire to win tournaments quickly flags when you realise how uninspired the courses are. Despite the different routes, it's a flaccid, finger-constantly-on-accelerate kind of racing game that doesn't even deserve the effort of looking at the back of the box in the shop.

If you only buy one abnormally average ski-doo game this year, buy *X-Team Racing*. If you buy two, you're an idiot.

"I wonder what's for dinner tonight."

"Whoops. Sorry about that."

"I think I will. Bye.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P233 **Memory** 32Mb RAM **WE SAY** P300, 64Mb RAM

PCZVERDICT

⊕ **UPPERS** I'll have to get back to you on that one

⊖ **DOWNERS** Unfair CPU catch-up • Bad graphics • Poor handling • Uninspired and excitement-free

24 Categorically, the second best ski-doo game the PC has ever seen!

Unfortunately there's no sign of Milla Jovovich wearing nothing but a bandage.

"Mr Muscle foam cleaner has done wonders for my drains."
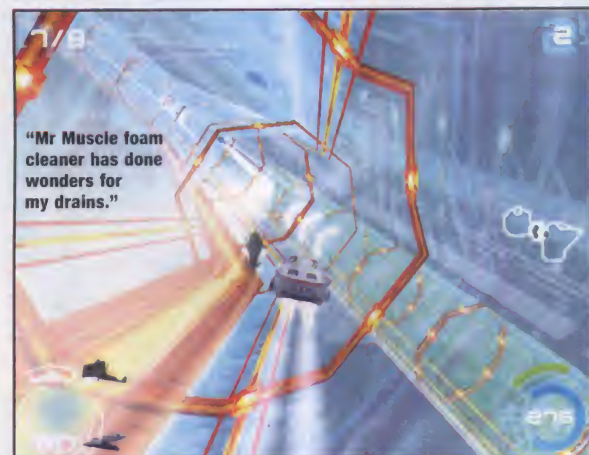
NEW YORK RACE

⭐ £29.99 • Wanadoo • Out November 23

Richie Shoemaker finds there are no doughnuts in this game

The gridlocked streets of New Yoik are hardly the perfect setting for a racing game, hence driving games previously set in the Big Apple, or near approximations of it, have offered slightly more than simple track-based racing – *Grand Theft Auto* being one. Thankfully the highways of *New York Race* are a good deal higher than you're used to, as the game takes as its sole inspiration the taxi chase scenes of *The Fifth Element*, where jelly-mould cars hover in mid air, and can reach nosedive speeds of 500mph. It's the future.

Effectively what you're doing then is racing planes, with a great deal more freedom than if you were glued to a strip of tarmac. Consequently you can benefit from screaming into a dive and overtaking under your opponents, usually before having to climb again into a narrow tube. Or

nipping under street lamps, or over monorails – which although far from realistic, certainly quenches the thirst for console-style racing. It helps of course that *NYR* is a nippy little game, causing you in the early stages to scrape past neon-lit skyscrapers or plunge through the bright urban landscape.

Graphically *NY Race* isn't harmed at all by its obvious PS2 graphical leanings. Even though this causes your opponents to become a blur of colour among the bright buildings, the helpful swirls of vapour that tail behind make up for it.

The only real problem is that this is a racing game, and a typically shallow one which follows the same formula of dozens before it. The highlight is to progress through a rather tired Championship Mode, unlocking new vehicles as you go. It

certainly isn't a game to keep you at your PC for any length of time and though it might be fast and fun for a while, *Crazy Taxi* this certainly isn't.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 400 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 16Mb Direct3D card **WE SAY** Works fine, though we'd say that 600Mb hard drive space is a bit cheeky

PCZVERDICT

⊕ **UPPERS** Fast • Generally good track design • Bright attractive graphics

⊖ **DOWNERS** It's just racing • Diverting rather than addictive

70 Enjoyably frantic but ultimately shallow

ONLINEZONE

PC GAMING FOR THE MASSES www.pczone.co.uk **#10 CHRISTMAS 2001**

NEOCRON

Deus Ex meets Blade Runner – finally, an online RPG for action fans

MOTOR CITY ONLINE

We take the Web's hottest racer for a spin around the block

RED ALERT 2: YURI'S REVENGE
BALDUR'S GATE II: THE DARKEST DAY
AZURE SHEEP
SHOGUN: THE MONGOL INVASION
COLISEUM
ZEN QUANTUM JET FIGHTERS

LET'S STICK TOGETHER

Community is king when it comes to online games, for without a solid base of loyal fans, a game has no heart or soul, let alone any players. The finest developer in the world could create a stunning work of art, lock themselves away and spend years mysteriously coding, yet without letting anyone know what they are up to, it would all be for nothing. Releasing a few screenshots every six months isn't enough anymore, today you have to open your doors to the baying hordes of online gamers. You have to release code, open yourself up to relentless criticism, and when and if the game nears 'completion', a developer will hopefully have thousands of people dribbling in anticipation.

Without the aid of millions of publisher's dollars, this is what has happened with both *Dark Age Of Camelot* and *Neocron*. LucasArts has been uncommonly open with *Star Wars Galaxies* and the fact that loyal *Star Wars* fans have been throwing ideas around on the official forums, will surely do the game a lot of good.

The voice of the gamer has never been more vocal or more important than it is today. Not only do developers expect feedback they positively encourage it. And if you play online games or mods, you have a duty to oblige. You never know, you could influence future development and seeing as it's you that ultimately pays for this, it's no bad thing.

Richie Shoemaker
Online Editor

CONTENTS

HOW WE SCORE ONLINE GAMES

You'll notice our Online scores are out of five. This is partly to avoid confusion with scores in the main *PC ZONE* reviews section and partly so we don't have to decide between giving a mod 63 or 64 per cent, plus it looks nice. Five stars means great, and one doesn't. It's pretty simple really.

PCZVERDICT ☑

★★★★★	Excellent
★★★★☆	Very good
★★★☆☆	Decent
★★☆☆☆	Not bad
★☆☆☆☆	Bad

↑ Currently both X^2 and *X – Online* use the same graphics engine and 3D models. This will probably change when X^2 is finished and X2OL development continues.

ONLINE UNIVERSE

The *X* universe goes multiplayer for the first time

Role-playing is and always will be the dominant form of online gaming, thanks mainly to its social demands on the player. Hence the most popular online games at the moment are like *EverQuest* in setting, where players seek to improve their character.

But a character need not be human, elf or goblin. Science fiction has just as much to offer and unlike fantasy games, you don't even have to stick to one planet or set foot on terra firma at all. Like its single-player cousin – the sequel to which is previewed on p10, *X – Online*, (also known as *Online Universe* or *X2OL*), is all about flying in space and rather than trying to reach level 10, the aim is simply to 'level up' your ship, by upgrading engines, shields, weapons or indeed the size of the cargo hold. If you're new to the *X* universe, I suggest you go back and read p10, veterans can read on.

"*X – Online* has been in development for a long time and we are already testing many components of the technology, both at server and client level," says Bernd Lehahn, creator of the *X* universe. "It's just impossible to say when X2OL will go public. It's impossible to say when it will be finished anyway, because it will never be – it will always continue to change and grow. Currently we are financing the development of X2OL on our own. Finding a perfect investor would allow us to bring X2OL to the Net much faster. At the moment all I can say is that it will not be out before X^2."

Concurrently in development with X^2, both it and *X – Online* share many technical features, not least in the graphics department, but as X^2's release nears and work begins full-throttle on the online game, the latter will of course receive a facelift.

"Some of the things which are different between *Online Universe* and X^2 may seem like small steps, but if you see the full game, they bring it into a whole new dimension," explains Lehahn. "The 'components' mark the biggest difference between the two games from a player's perspective."

He goes on: "In *X* and X^2 you have more or less 'static' objects (stations, ships). In X2OL the universe is made from components on every possible level. This adds an amazing complexity to the game. Every player can build things differently. No two ships in the universe need to be the same. Every factory a player builds can be unique."

Such a promised level of detail is staggering. While in RPGs we've been able to outfit our avatars with various cloaks, we've not been able to completely customise ships in space games, certainly not to such a degree as to make them totally unique. Other features planned include systems to support 'player-enforced law', where real players can patrol the skies rather than rely on game-enforced rules where attacking in certain areas is simply not an option.

"We definitely want to make X2OL the ultimate space online game," says Lehahn. "And that is a task which will take a long period of time."

With aspirations like this the least we can do is be patient. While you're waiting, visit www.online-universe.net.

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

A game set over here that's doing rather well over there

From humble beginnings Mythic Entertainment's *Dark Age Of Camelot* looks set to finally eclipse *EverQuest* as the online RPG of choice, with news that preorders have exceeded 100,000 – far more than the 30,000 initial users the developers were aiming for. Vivendi, publishers of *Half-Life*, have since released the game in the States and European publisher Wanadoo are hoping for similar success when the game hits Europe in January. Needless to say, our spies are smuggling a box through customs and we'll take a look at it for next issue.

For those who've missed our previous coverage on *Camelot* (or who can't be bothered visiting www.darkageofcamelot.com), the game follows the same lines laid out by *EverQuest*. But where

EverQuest is very much a free-for-all, *Camelot* offers three very different realms, and each player must pledge an allegiance to one of them. First there is Albion, the post-King Arthur kingdom around the legendary Camelot. Then there is Hibernia, the mystical Celt kingdom and finally Midgard, the Nordic homeland full of beardy warriors. Each race of course has a full complement of player classes, from Albion's Fighters, Mages and Rogues, to Hibernia's Enchanters and Nightshades and Midgard's Vikings and Thanes.

The game will feature plenty of spells, weapons, special items, missions and monsters but what promises to make *Camelot* the online RPG of choice is the epic large-scale combat: each

realm is made up of home territories and frontier zones. The homelands are for players of your own race or creed, relatively safe areas where the main threats are NPC creatures and characters. The frontier is where the three sides fight for control of forts and castles, where the more settlements your side conquer, the more your whole realm will benefit. Brave warriors are given elaborate titles and special items. As well as the sheer numbers involved in such epic battles, we're told each side will even be able to field siege engines.

Already many are claiming *Dark Age Of Camelot* the best online role-player so far. We'll give you our verdict on the US game next month. European server testing is slated for November, with a full release in January 2002.

"Virgil, you haven't forgotten the Vaseline again, have you?"

As you can see, Chris Anderson has already got stuck in.

It wouldn't be an online RPG without colourful names.

spraggonix

Dreamcast! Geddit? How about head-hammer? Forget it.

HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO

Everyone's a hero in Paragon City except for the bad guys

Typically in an online RPG you start by choosing a race, profession, a few skills, then set about choosing what colour of leather jerkin you'll be running around in before you can afford a new set of robes or some magical armour. You start at the bottom of the food chain, terrorised by small furry mammals for a few hours and after some months you might earn some respect. How much better would it be if you started off a hard bastard? The answer: loads. *City Of Heroes* being somewhat different to most online role-playing games has you playing as a superhero, a cut above the rest of the population. Unfortunately so is every other player.

So apart from being able to design your own superhero suit, avec pants, what is *City Of Heroes* all about? Set in the fictional East Coast Paragon City,

each superhero will be able to choose from over 40 superpowers, depending on which types of hero they choose to be, from mutants and 'altered humans' to those with cybernetic or magical powers. Rather than simply live on the goodwill of the citizens of the city, you'll have to actually hire out your services and take on the bad guys in co-operative missions, the aim being to hoard plenty of money and build up your standing among the thousands of other superheroes. Player-versus-player combat will be handled in special arenas rather than through the streets, meaning the streets of Paragon will be relatively safe. Beta testing is due to start early next year with the game due for release next summer. Cast your x-ray eyes over www.cityofheroes.com for all the details.

Unfortunately, no official superheroes are allowed, so no, you can't be Spiderman.

Camouflageman's other suit was in the wash.

ENDLESS AGES

A matter of life and constant death in another dimension

When we die we're told heaven or hell awaits us. Whether we're destined for either, scheduled for rebirth as a dung beetle or simply food for maggots, we can't really say, but it seems *Endless Ages* is offering another exit from mortal anguish, a place where not only are human souls reincarnated, but those of every other race across the universe.

A fantastic setting for a game indeed and one that in online terms instantly rectifies the age-old problem of player death. Since *Endless Ages* is set in an importunate realm, where once entered you can't leave,

you are simply reborn into it when set about and killed. Similarly each race and individual is made equal, both in language and endurance. If *Endless Ages* weren't a game, its premise certainly would inspire an interesting philosophical debate.

Primarily an RPG, *Endless Ages* is a multi-headed beast, offering elements of first-person combat, simulation, business and tactics. You can choose to fight and explore or simply stay at home and bake cakes. Curiously, *Endless Ages* offers no time frame. Though with an obvious sci-fi bent, new souls (players) can enter from any time period, meaning players can be

anything from medieval knights to futuristic death lords from planet piss.

Countless vehicles will make it into the game, from submersibles to flying boats, tanks and spaceships. But perhaps the game's biggest innovation is the engine: vibrant and colourful we're promised a massive seamless world with no loading times, as well as whole areas that can phase in and out of existence. It sounds a bit weird and wacky, but with a shortage of original online ideas, *Endless Ages* should prove a tonic when it arrives next spring. For more information, check out www.endlessages.com.

There's some pretty odd creatures about.

One of them there futuristic death lords.

A rabid mix of game genres.

↑ Here's one someone else created earlier.

LORD OF CONSTRUCTION

Bored of *EverQuest* and *Diablo*? Why not build your own

Computer games don't just grow on trees you know. Created by talented programmers, artists, designers and musicians, games take years to perfect and though we here are rather scathing in our criticism of some, we do it because we care about you. The simple fact is that if you were to put us in front of a copy of 3D Max or C+++++ we'd probably start crying like babies. Our brains aren't wired the right way, hence we spend our lives criticising the works of others far more talented than ourselves.

But hark, redemption is at hand. Out now and available to buy online for US$30 (plus another US$20 for P&P) is MMORPGCK, which roughly

translates as the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game Construction Kit (phew), apparently the world's first massively multiplayer online role-playing… you get the idea.

Focused exclusively on the beardy genre, MMORPGCK allows you to create countless isometric fantasy maps, populate them with dwarves, trolls, Chris Andersons and Rhianna Pratchetts, create your own spells, items, quests and so on. For your bucks you also get a ready-made game, *Trinity Of Darkness*, which if you lose interest in the game development industry after failing to better *EverQuest*, you can invite your online friends over to play for free. Visit www.trinityofdarkness.com to place your order.

↑ With two years to go, there's still a bit of a wait.

↑ Players should be able to use a few vehicles.

WORST CASE SCENARIO

For a few dollars less

Swedish developer Moosehill have realistic aims for their real-world strategy game *Worst Case Scenario*. Self-funded and paid in handfuls of monkey nuts (probably), the team admit that far from the likelihood of pulling in 100,000 subscribers, they could happily keep running with 8,000 loyal subscribers paying US$8 a month.

Influenced by tabletop wargames like *Warhammer* and the Gollop classic *X-Com*, WCS

will be a turn-based squad-level strategy game, where up to eight players fight across realistic environments. Players will be able to choose from a number of specialist troops, snipers, medics etc, and we are promised fantasy elements as well. Teams will consist of between ten and 40 units, with turns lasting only a matter of seconds.

Worst Case Scenario is due to be distributed online, though release isn't planned until 2003. Find out more at www.moosehill.se.

MODWATCH

Tony Lamb feels the force… again

2002. Another year older, and yet another year since *Star Wars* burst into our lives. That was 1977, nearly 25 years ago. Sci-fi of course hasn't looked back since, and neither have the modding fans of games like Relic's *Homeworld* and *Homeworld: Cataclysm*, who have taken *Star Wars* and other biggies of the genre and built mods in their honour.

One of the biggest *HW* mods is *Star Wars Fleet Academy* whose homepage is at www.tgu.org.uk/users/swfa. Now at version 5.5, *SWFA* is a comprehensive mod with a huge set of ships and an impressive website. Everything puts in an appearance from weenie TIE fighters and X-wings to Nebulon-B Frigates and Imperial Star Destroyers. Alternatively, check out the *Star Wars: Episode I* mod that sees its first public release with version 0.12. Being so new, the range of ships is limited, but the ones done so far have a lot of potential. Find out more at www.strategyplanet.com/homeworld/starwarsep1.

Sci-fi TV series have also come under the modders spotlight and one of the latest to be lauded is *Space: Above and Beyond* which, despite unfriendly TV scheduling in the UK, managed to earn itself a sizeable following. Check out www.saab-mod.net where you'll find beta 1 available for download. The ships done so far look the business and there's more under development.

Another TV series modded for *Homeworld* is *Babylon 5*, which can be found at http://mods.firstones.com/homeworld. Beta 5 version 3 is now available and it might be a while before anything new comes along. Not perfect, but no *Homeworld*-owning *B5* fan should be without it.

Other *Homeworld* mods of note include *Turanic Raiders*, now at version 1.05.1 (www.strategyplanet.com/piratesmod/turanic) and *Fleet Action* (a tribute to the *Wing Commander* series) at www.strategyplanet.com/homeworld/fleetaction.

Coming back down to earth, the frenzy of FPS mod creation shows no signs of slowing down. Old favourite *Science and Industry* for *Half-Life* is still going strong and is now up to version 0.97. The plot involves capturing enemy scientists and getting them to develop weapons for you (while stopping the other team from kidnapping yours), but there are now new maps and other features to enjoy. The latest version of this popular online game is on the CD. Check out www.planethalflife.com/si too.

A new mod for *Unreal Tournament* fans can be found in the guise of *Marathon Resurrection*, Beta 1.1 of which is now on general release. It's a rebirth of a 1994 Bungie title called (surprise) *Marathon* and adds a new multiplayer game type, new weapons and loads more to the *UT* experience. Find it at http://resurrection.bungie.org. Also new for *UT* (and on the CD) is version 2.0 of the *Uspace* mod which lets you get into spaceships and zap around shooting other spaceships too. It's LAN only so far (no single-player or online opportunities unfortunately), but shows promise. For more information check out www.planetunreal.com/uspace.

Quake III fans aren't left out either, with Threewave's new CTF mod finally being released. There are no less than 35 maps, a new game type called Capture Strike, mini-games between maps, voting and more. Visit www.threewave.com for the full monty on this monster mod. New for *Quake II*, is *1492: Anno Domini* which is a top mod with some truly spectacular maps and frantic gameplay. You'll need a hefty PC to deal with the sheer number of enemies, so speed demons only need apply to http://utenti. tripod.it/shanks/1492/ pagina_1x for the file.
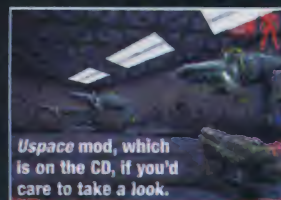
Uspace mod, which is on the CD, if you'd care to take a look.

Crack open a tinny and watch the sunset.

Copbots keep the Plaza relatively safe

Mutants are a monumental pain in the arse. Shoot them in the head.

Get ready for a world unlike any other

NEOCRON

BETA TEST

Anarchy Online may well have been the first futuristic online RPG but *Neocron* is hot on its heels. *Chris Anderson* jumps on the beta test bandwagon for a hands-on taste of the action

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Reakktor
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft
OUT Q1 2002
WEBSITE www.neocron.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Ground-breaking approach to character development
- Vehicles, and lots of them
- Tight player community with working inter-player economy
- Impressively stable and quick loading between zones even at beta stage

While recent entries into the online role-playing genre have innovated in terms of interface and design (most notably *Anarchy Online*), developer Reakktor are attempting to rewrite the RPG rulebook with *Neocron*, a cyberpunk MMORPG set in one of Earth's last remaining cities in the year 2750. Think *Blade Runner* meets *Judge Dread* with a dash of *The Matrix*. At the time of writing, *Neocron* is on Beta 2 with Beta 3 imminent, and is already displaying, not only a rich and darkly absorbing setting, but also some innovative ways of approaching the whole concept of character development and combat. While the choice of class is currently

limited – you can only play a psi monk (technowizard), spy (hacker), private eye (jack-of-all-trades) or tank (fighter) at the moment, hopefully there will be more choices upon release – you can customise your character to a huge extent in the game. For example, the psi monk casts psi

be driven by the desire to try and level up your character as much as possible, spend your time collecting together as much loot as you can stuff into the *Matrix*-style jacket pockets or strive to get the most challenging missions from your chosen faction. In particular the way *Neocron* deals with levelling is

> **From what's currently on offer in *Neocron*, there is more than enough for players to do than just killing everything that moves**

spells but if you allocate experience points in the correct areas you can make your psi monk more than capable of handling a serious weapon too.

Ultimately, what you'll get out of *Neocron* will be down to how you choose to play the game. You might

entirely different to anything you will have seen before. Reakktor have thrown the traditional method of levelling up out of the window, and instead installed a system whereby your character gains not only levels but also skill points. There are five basic attributes: strength,

Warbots having a bit of a scrap.

PepperPark – home of the strippers.
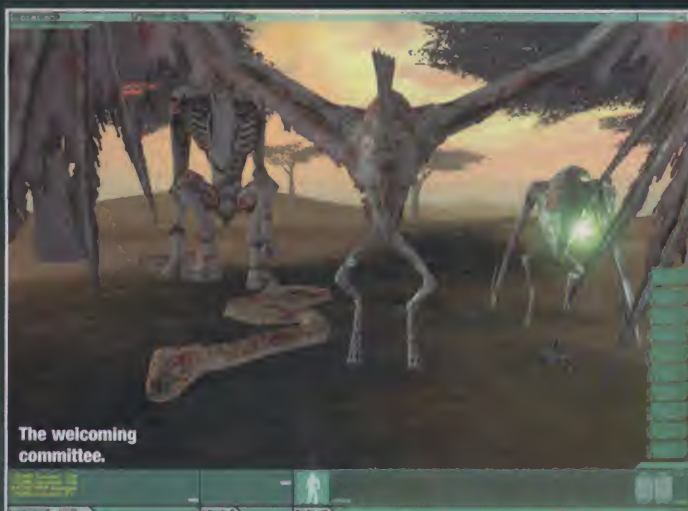
The welcoming committee.

constitution, dexterity, psi power and intelligence. Each of these will be linked to certain sub-skills, such as the transport skill, which control the amount of stuff you can carry. The way you choose to navigate your character through the game will directly effect his or her physical and mental make-up. Use a melee weapon a lot and your strength and dexterity will increase, run around a

lot and your constitution will increase. The combat system is also influenced by skills but nevertheless retains a strong element of flexibility. "However, you can make up a bit for character skills with your own reflexes," claims Jens Bremmekamp, community and game content manager for *Neocron*. "For instance you can run around monsters and

attack them from behind, hide around a corner and take them by surprise, or just duck behind a barrel for cover. It's much more intuitive and flexible than 'normal' MMORPG combat systems." This approach to levelling also goes a long way to alleviating the obsession with levelling up in games like *EverQuest* and *Anarchy Online*, where most players play the game

purely to reach the next level, at the expense of any real appreciation of the game's mechanics. In *Neocron* half the fun will be getting there.

PROOF OF LIFE

Obviously, at this stage, a lot of *Neocron*'s content has yet to be put into the game, but from what's currently on offer, there is more ➔

Standing still is sometimes much safer than moving.

```
LOCATION:    PLAZA SECTOR 1      SOULLIGHT:      100    cash:          24 CR

COPBOT : What'cha lookin' at!
COPBOT : What'cha lookin' at!
Flynn : HOW DO YOU RUN????
Ghengis Drakes : shift
eNCHI (Test) : lol haz der cb hat wieder 100%
Mustard_Man : wow, incredibly unplayable ;-)
Squall : GI-Joe, are you on your way?
GI-Joe : squal im at the allbuyer
Cronos : ?
Blutgott : LOL can one of the devs give me 110k ncs i
lost my imps coz ofa pc crash :(
Ghengis Drakes : i see people
J.C DENTON : Storbot: Where is the insurance building
to get my stuff back :-)
Ghengis Drakes : but no ones close yet
Squall : plaza sector 1 ???????

Seminus (XX)
Pegasus
Vokus
Sabot
Memnoch
```

than enough for players to do than just killing everything that moves. Even at this stage players were making their own mark on *Neocron* with events – a particular favourite is the notorious fight club that takes place underneath the strip joint.

detailed, realistic and fantastically dark in atmosphere, as opposed to colourful and vibrant such as those in *Anarchy Online*. I make no excuses for drawing *AO* comparisons, as *AO* is obviously the closest game on the market to *Neocron* in terms of style

before the unfortunate incident occurred. *Anarchy Online* tackles the problem differently by taking away all the experience you gained since your last save, although it makes a slight concession to this in that you never lose a level when you die. Reakktor has gone out on a limb in this area by ensuring you lose no experience whatsoever when you die.

All that happens is your statistics will be temporarily reduced, and you will have to return to where you died to get your belongings, unless you have the money to pay to get your inventory items back instantly. There are penalties for dying if you take out your law enhancer chip and risk other players looting your corpse, but if you choose to live a totally risk-free

> **The graphics, while not wildly impressive, are detailed, realistic and fantastically dark**

Trade skills are already advanced enough for players to make items that other players are willing to buy. This is in stark contrast to *Anarchy Online* which, even months after its release, has still to implement important trade skills in the game. Also, while the *Neocron* server is sparsely populated at the moment, there is no noticeable lag whatsoever, even in crowded parts of the city. Personally, I would prefer to have a game that was pretty and playable, rather than one which had obscenely high detail but was rendered unplayable as a result.

That's not to say *Neocron* isn't visually arresting. The graphics, while not wildly impressive, are

and subject matter. However, it's obviously too early to decide which of the two is most worth your money as *Neocron* is a work in progress and could change dramatically even with the release of Beta 3.

DEATH BECOMES YOU
Dealing with death. This is a subject of much controversy in online RPGs. *Ultima Online* penalises death by reducing your standing in the game and, as such, is not much of a deal when compared with *EverQuest*. This game penalises you heavily for death by taking away a set amount of experience thereby making it difficult for you to get back to where you were

Neocron's subway system takes you round the city quickly and safely.

Job terminals are in the game, but they are not active yet. This will be where you get your quests.

Rats, get used to them. You'll kill a lot of them at the start of the game.

CHIPS AHOY   ? X

PLAYER-KILLERS PARADISE

Morons of the world unite, this game is made for you

While it's possible to play the game safely by keeping your law enforcer chip in, there are huge penalties for this, so most people take it out. When you take your chip out, your name changes from green to yellow. Yellow players can kill other yellow players and steal any items they had equipped in their Quick Belt (QB). This has, of course, attracted a large number of player killers who hang round dark areas waiting to kill players who are lower than them in level and steal everything they have. I was personally killed several times by a higher level player in the *Neocron* sewers (hello Fl3wless, you turd) even though he knew there was nothing in my QB after the first time he killed me, so he was just doing it for fun. These people are called 'grief killers' and their only reason for existence is to

piss people off by repeatedly killing them when they can't fight back. All of this has resulted in constant messages in the chat channel from people saying things like 'that's it I quit' and 'I can't believe that bastard just killed me again.' Although PvP is an integral part of *Neocron*, one of the ways in which the game will penalise PKers is by way of the 'Soul Light' system, which is basically a reputation system that gets darker the more PKs a character gets. Indulge in too much bad behaviour and you could find yourself forced out into the Wastelands with a very large bounty on your head. But most victims of grief will probably do what I fully intend to do, and that's power level my character to a point where I can go back and kill the bastard over, and over, and over again.

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

With the absence of fanatical levelling and *Neocron*'s fairly casual policy towards death, this game is likely to attract a large number of people to the online RPG genre who might otherwise have stayed away. Whether the hardcore RPG veterans will take to such a system is quite another thing altogether, but generally speaking, Reakktor seem to have got everything else just about right. There is a strong sense of community in *Neocron*, and players are generally helpful and chatty, plus it's possible to get your character to a reasonable degree of competence within a relatively short period of time. The only reservation I have about the

game at this point is that the gameworld itself feels a little on the small side. *EverQuest* was huge even before any expansion discs, and while it's true that Reakktor are planning to add more content to the game before its release, my feeling is the game will need to be at least five times larger than it currently is to maintain continuous interest. Given that *Neocron* is currently three months from release at the time of writing, our hopes are high that Beta 3 will bring with it a huge amount of new content and new locations to explore.

As ever, we will be bringing you constant updates on the game's progress, and a full review when the servers go live. **PCZ**

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existence in *Neocron*, you can easily do so.

This seems something of a strange decision, since knowing there is no risk if you die takes a lot of the bite out of combat situations – players will be fighting simply to increase their skills and not for the thrill of combat that you get from other games in this genre. However, if you take this path, you will be penalised severely in other ways. For example, players with their law enforcer chip intact will not gain as

While most players have removed their chip and taken the risk of being killed by players and losing all their belongings, there is a sizeable minority who are taking the safe approach and playing the game without risk and accepting the penalties imposed upon them as a result.

Whether it's a good thing that Reakktor are giving people a choice in this aspect of the game, I think the penalties imposed on people playing safe are very severe. The

> ## This game is likely to attract a large number of people to the online RPG genre who might otherwise have stayed away

much experience from combat or through trade as those players who have discarded it. Additionally, in order to use certain weapons and items you need to raise your skills to a much higher level than those players who do not have the law enforcer chip. From what I've seen of the game so far, the *Neocron* beta community appear to be divided on which path to take.

experience penalty is, in itself, fair enough, but the skill point penalty makes it far too difficult to improve your skills high enough to use certain weapons and items. This is what forces many players (including myself) to remove the chip, exposing themselves to higher level players lurking in the shadows waiting to kill them in one shot and take all their inventory.

Hold on to your big end

MOTOR CITY ONLINE

BETA

MCO features more camera angles than a Dutch porn flick.

Inside the nasty wooden cockpit of a nasty oid Pontiac.

⊕ Before each race you're given a chance to kick tyres and inspect machinery.

It's the golden age of American car culture. *Phil Wand* swaps his '90s Nissan for a '50s road boat

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Electronic Arts
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
WEBSITE www.motorcityonline.com
OUT TBA (beta version out now, 428Mb)
PRICE £29 box, plus monthly subscription, £TBA

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- ✪ The venerable *Need For Speed* series goes online, which can only be a good thing
- ✪ Lots of American cars we can never normally hope to drive
- ✪ A grease monkey's wet dream – tinker with spanners and things
- ✪ Gamble your custom designs with other players

Our first street race in *Motor City Online* was for a pink slip. To an American, a pink slip is an official certificate of title, granting the holder legal ownership of a vehicle. To an Englishman, a pink slip is an item of clothing that pokes out from underneath grandma when she does the weeding. While we didn't think that we'd be risking life and limb for a sleeveless undergarment, we were unaware that defeat would mean the loss of the car we'd bought not ten minutes previously.

MMM, NICE CAR

Ah yes: the wheels. A nasty, hateful American thing dating from the mid 1950s, with vulcanised tyres, no brakes, and more miles on the clock than the USS Enterprise. A car that would be out-accelerated by the average glacier and out-handled by the average Flymo. Had we been given the opportunity to sign up for a race where it was clearly stated that the loser lost everything, we might have been a little less hasty in entering our giant lawnmower.

We found ourselves sat on the start line in our 800 cubic inch, 29 horsepower tank, with a Chevrolet Gaylord Caprice Classic Hemi Demi Shelby '57 (or whatever) alongside us. It proudly bore the number plate USA 1 and was decked out with stars and stripes paintwork – fuelling our desire to heighten the '50s atmos by running him off the road and into the scenery, James Dean-style. But by the time our monster had grumbled into second gear, the other guy had ducked under the chequered flag, packed up and gone home for some of mom's apple pie, leaving us to create a second *MCO* personality and start afresh with a second Motown yacht.

NUTS AND BOLTS

Yet, as with so many games that infuriate you on their inaugural run, this one suckered us back for more. It might have been something to do with the fact that we'd endured a 428Mb download and weren't about to delete it in a hurry, but it was more likely to be the way the game lets you become one of a community where everyone is nuts about cars.

> **❝A car that would be out-accelerated by the average glacier and out-handled by the average Flymo❞**

And as certified car bores, we could not keep away. A big car club! For sad people like me! Where people race cars! On my computer! If only this chair had an integral toilet...

Yes, anyone who loves hot rods and customising will be in seventh heaven. *MCO* provides a virtual economy where dollars buy you a souped-up, supercharged motor with all manner of *Gran Turismo* demon tweaks. The fact that here you can flog, loan or auction anything in your possession, from the car itself down to the camshafts, lends it more depth than the PlayStation yardstick.

Originally destined to be the latest instalment in the ageing *Need For Speed* series, we think Electronic Arts have done the right thing by dropping single player and taking it to the Internet.

There are five key areas to the *MCO* experience. Drag Racing is all about going head-to-head with other drivers down a quarter-mile strip. Street Racing is where I lost my car in a pink slip event, although it is possible to join races where money is the incentive. It also features pedestrians and law-abiding traffic, making a massively multiplayer *Midtown Madness*. Circuit Racing puts drivers and their cars on a professional track, where winners earn cash and points. Sponsored Racing is where you don't have to worry about smashing your car up, as the cars are provided for you. Lastly, Open Trials sees you racing against the clock: this is the recommended place for newbies to start, as you can accrue money quite rapidly.

ANTIQUES ROADSHOW

As with the old *Need For Speed* series, any race you participate in can be replayed from a variety of different camera angles. The big yanks pitch, yaw and roll with undoubted realism, and because the graphics engine takes advantage of the latest DirectX 8.0 gimmickry, the cars look very authentic indeed. While the physics often stray into arcade and the cluttered front end is initially rather daunting, the game remains both realistic and playable.

It's just a shame – and this is the one recurring complaint – that

We wouldn't want one of these in reality. Why would anyone want one in virtuality?

everything you see and everything you drive is unfamiliar. Not one of the cars from the *MCO* showroom made it to UK shores, and they're all about 50 years old. On the upside there are over 2,000 upgrade parts that you can buy, sell and tinker with, plus 60 licensed vehicles and 24 tracks. When all is said and done, the thrill of winning and making money is what matters. Get involved in the online community and perhaps the antique era doesn't matter so much after all. **PCZ**

One of our sponsored runs in a Pontiac GTO.

'50S THROWBACK

Mustang or Mitsubishi? The latter please

As you may have guessed by now, we're not that keen on what people call the golden age of motoring – '50s America with its Camaros, Corvettes and Cadillacs. It would seem that the rest of the world agrees, yearning as it does for modern Japanese and German sports cars – witness the success of games such as *Ridge Racer*, *Midnight Club*, *Porsche Challenge* and the inimitable *Gran Turismo*. *The Fast and the Furious*, despite being one of the single most awful films of all time, demonstrates how masterpieces of turbo-charged technology such as the Nissan Skyline GT-R, Subaru Impreza WRX

and Toyota Supra have become part of petrolhead culture all over the world. Kids today no longer lust after a Mustang like the one Steve McQueen drove in *Bullitt*, or a Thunderbird with squealing whitewall tyres and a vinyl roof. Instead, they long to pop the bonnet on their tricked-up Mitsubishi and get wows from an admiring crowd. And so it's highly debatable whether Europeans, who on the whole aspire to driving BMWs, Ferraris and Porsches, will find a game full of ungainly American V8s all that appealing. Especially if they have to fork out for a monthly subscription.

American muscle cars can lay rubber like no other.

The joke about his mother and the newt wasn't going down well.

I'm betting on the one on the left.

The ice caves in the troll mountains are tough-going.

Assassins. You just can't trust 'em.

BALDUR'S GATE II: THE DARKEST DAY

⭐ Requires full version of *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn* • www.teambg.net/tdd

Rhianna Pratchett tries out the first mod for *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn*

Let's face it. Designing mods for a game as huge as *Baldur's Gate II* is no enviable task. Not only do you need to produce a comprehensive storyline and believable characters, you need to convince a demanding community that your mod will truly enhance a game that they have embraced, loved, and devoted hour upon hour to exploring. That's where we come in: we can categorically state that those who are put off by the fact that *The Darkest Day* is not an 'official' add-on, would be wise to just say 'oh what the hell' and start downloading the huge 266Mb file right now. Or alternatively just take it off this month's cover disc.

Designed by Max Schnur and Richard Haines, *The Darkest Day* runs alongside *Baldur's Gate II*, but is as yet unplayable with *The Throne Of Bhaal*. Working as a combination of both an add-on and add-in mod, *The Darkest Day* has its own ongoing storyline, comprising 40 minor quests, five major quests which overlap with the *BGII* story, and one mega-quest which takes place after the killing of Irenicus.

But it's the add-ins that really prolong the life of this mod, with over 75 new

"The add-ins really prolong the life of this mod, with 75 new character kits"

character kits including such dubious characters as Assassins, Blade Masters, Dragon Slayers, Warlocks and Ninjas. The character kits were one of the most innovative gameplay features in *BGII* and prolonged the longevity of the game enormously. Schnur and Haines have obviously taken this not only on board, but given it its own first-class cabin, with mints on the pillow and a complimentary bottle of champagne.

In order to make the most of these new kits, and nine new or returning NPCs from *BGI*, the mod offers 180+ new items (many of which are specific to the new kits) and 170+ new spells. *The Darkest Day* reunites you with some old acquaintances, including Kagain, Shar Teel, Montaron and Xzar – in fact there's much more of an opportunity to create a whole party aligned to evil. The need for a really powerful 'good' or 'neutral' magic user, to rival the likes of the evil Edwin, has also been addressed with the damn fine Robillard the Invoker.

With around 175 new areas to explore, some of which have been borrowed and revamped from *BGI* and *Icewind Dale*, it's hardly surprising that *The Darkest Day* takes up at least 30 hours (minimum) of extra gameplay time, and even die-hard fans should find the gameplay pretty challenging. There's currently already one patch out for the mod, and it's likely that more will follow soon as even the patched version had a few bugs ranging from simple typos and grammatical errors to more serious jerks and game freezes. There are also certain unresolved issues, such as a lack of any real new NPC interaction, which would undoubtedly benefit the mod. Nevertheless *The Darkest Day* proves that when fans get it right, all that time they've spent obsessing, compiling lists, posting continual forum messages and all the other things RPG enthusiasts get up to in darkened rooms, can pay off. The day may be dark, but the future is bright. **PCZ**

PCZVERDICT ✓

🔼 **UPPERS** Lots of great gameplay features • Worth the download time • Prolongs the life of *Baldur's Gate II* many times over

🔽 **DOWNERS** Still buggy • You need to start a new game • Doesn't work with *Throne of Bhaal* unfortunately

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐
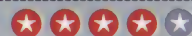
RED ALERT 2 – YURI'S REVENGE

£19.99 • EA • Out now • Requires full version of *Red Alert 2* • www.westwood.com

Richie Shoemaker takes the latest in the *C&C* saga online and discovers a man who may or may not be able to bend spoons

Nothing like a bit of gene therapy.

Since *Half-Life* and its add-on *Opposing Force*, games developers have slowly begun to realise the potential in telling the same story from slightly different angles, rather than completely opposite ends. Usually you play as one side or the other, but here you fight against a common enemy, Yuri.

Another trend in gaming is where a game's multiplayer component offers numerous gameplay extras. In last year's *Red Alert 2*, this was achieved by giving each side an exclusive multiplayer unit and in *Yuri's Revenge*, Westwood

"This is the voice of the Mysterons!"

has taken this aspect still further. While you can play against Yuri and his psychic minions as Allies or Soviets in the respective single-player campaign, it is only in skirmish and multiplayer games that you can play as Yuri.

Well yes it is a big draw. Yuri's forces are a challenge to control, since to a man they are far more distinct than previous *C&C* offerings. At the centre of Yuri's strategy is mind-control, and from the most basic structures to the most devastating of weapons, it's going to take a patient strategy on your part to overcome Yuri's army.

Aside from a couple of nice new multiplayer features (six player maps, team alliances), *Yuri's* other big draw is its multiplayer campaign, offering ten co-operative missions. The quality of these missions varies and because the AI is as predictable as ever, it's hardly a major challenge to the experienced player, but a boost all the same. Mainly however what we have again is a fun arcade-style strategy game, with finely balanced units and a whole load of hyper-destructive weapons. So even though *Yuri's Revenge* is a good single-player experience, it represents superb value to the online gamer. To miss out on the multiplayer features would be a waste of your investment.

PCZVERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Play as Yuri • Extra online enhancements • Co-operative missions •
⬇ **DOWNERS** Dated graphics

⭐⭐⭐⭐☆

Redder than ever

SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR – THE MONGOL INVASION V1.01

£19.99 • EA • Out now • Requires full version of *Shogun* • www.totalwar.com

It's getting on a bit these days, but *Richie Shoemaker* finds *Shogun* still in command

The Mongol hordes require different tactics to command well.

When it first came out *Shogun: Total War's* online game was a bit of a mess. Much as we enjoyed – and still do – the single-player campaign, the multiplayer Net code was in disarray: laggy, bugged and worst of all, open to rampant cheating on the part of the game's dishonourable few.

Much has changed over the last year. Fixed well before the release of the recent *Mongol Invasion* add-on, we find now a stable, finely balanced and involving strategy game, where to a far greater degree than other RTS titles, success depends on a player's tactical planning. There are loopholes of course, but like *Counter-Strike's* 'bunny-hoppers', such strategies can be countered. While *Mongol Invasion* had its teething problems, with the recent patch the general consensus here is that *Shogun MI* is quite an improvement.

What we have then is the same mix of epic real-time strategy and tactical manoeuvring across the lands of feudal Japan, now of course with Mongol units. New features include a few CTF-style multiplayer game types, eight-player battles and a number of minor tweaks that perhaps only the hardcore will notice. Effectively then, what we're saying is that if you gave up on *Shogun's* online game, it's certainly worth going back to. The computer may put up a good fight, but as is always the case, there's no better feeling in gaming today than to see your human opponent flee from the field of battle, a handful of decimated troops scurrying behind. Brilliant.

Carnage, as usual.

PCZVERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Many bugs fixed • Loads of multiplayer options • Unrivalled tactically
⬇ **DOWNERS** Still a few dishonourable players • No full online campaign

⭐⭐⭐⭐☆

The best RTS there is, online or off, but not perfect

AZURE SHEEP

⭐ Requires full version of *Half-Life* • Out now • www.halflifeitalia.com/azuresheep

Not many sheep, unfortunately, but at least *Tony Lamb* is reviewing it

With the plethora of multiplayer add-ons around, any *Half-Life* single-player outing is worthy of comment, but so far several have become 3D platform puzzlers with occasional glimpses of the *Half-Life* atmosphere thrown in for effect. Not so *Azure Sheep* which has obviously had far more than its fair share of blood, sweat and tears put into it. In fact, there are many games around that should be ashamed of their £30 price tags, because *Azure Sheep* is so damned slick that it deserves a CD and shiny cardboard box all of its own. That it's free too is rare evidence that maybe God does like gamers after all.

Yet again it's back to the Black Mesa complex. You arrive in the guise of Barney the security guard just in time to see Gordon Freeman arrive for work, and five minutes before all hell breaks loose in the labs. Then the soldiers arrive and decide that the clean-up operation

includes wasting your sorry ass along with all the aliens.

To complicate matters, you must rescue fellow security guard Kate – the mysteriously codenamed Azure Sheep –

> ❝ Kate turns out to be a tanned and curvaceous brunette with a behind that looks like it could crack walnuts ❞

from the bowels of the complex, and this becomes a pivotal part of the mod. To aid in your enthusiasm for this, Kate turns out to be a tanned and curvaceous brunette with a behind that looks like it could crack walnuts, and with her as your inspiration, you'll soon be happily bashing one-eyed monsters as the two of you fight your way back out of the base. You'll come across no end of soldiers and Xen nasties on

the way, so make sure you look after Kate. Luckily, health stations are in reasonable supply, and you'll even get a HEV suit too.

As you go through *Azure Sheep*, take a moment to notice how good Black Mesa looks. From the sheer detail of the indoor set pieces to the mind-boggling vertigo of the first major climb, these maps are superb, and great fun to play.

That's not to say *Azure Sheep* is perfect. It's occasionally difficult to know (or even guess) what you're supposed to do next – there's just too much to explore. Sometimes too the maps seem to be a gigantic Etch-a-sketch nightmare of twisting, turning corridors. No real architect would come up with some of these layouts.

However, such faults are few and easily overlooked when *Azure Sheep*'s all-round

spooge-worthy treats are taken together. It's a remarkably cohesive mod, with maps easily up to the standard of the original game, a clever and often witty use of the nastiest beasties that Xen can offer, great use of the soldier AI, a sexy heroine and myriad other treats seamlessly welded into the *Half-Life* experience. **PCZ**

Some areas of Black Mesa are full of danger.

All your old friends are here to meet you.
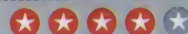
Are you looking at my bum again Barney?

Gordon Freeman arrives in his red sports car... What a poser.

COLISEUM 2 V2.6

⭐ Requires full version of *Quake III* patched to 1.3 • Out now •
www.planetquake.com/greenhouseefx

Tony Lamb decides to stay at home rather than go camping

Coliseum takes its cue from an older *Quake II* mod called *Lithium* which enabled users and server admins alike to tweak many aspects of their game. This time round however, there are some novel new features. The biggest of these is the addition of five new power-ups – here called Runes – which boost various facets of your game. These five Runes are Strength (increases weapon impact), Resistance (permanent body armour), Haste (weapons fire faster), Regeneration (replenishes health lost in battle) and Vampire (gives you health as you hurt an enemy). In a new twist on the power-up idea, these Runes aren't time-limited, but you can only benefit from one at a time and will have to drop the one you are carrying in order to pick up and enjoy another. You'll have to find a key to 'drop' otherwise you'll find yourself lumbered with one Rune throughout a whole game – you can see which one you've got by looking at your HUD.

Other features include configurable weapons (type, impact, rate of fire and choice of weapon hand), new sounds, a laser-style grappling hook and – most interestingly – an anti-camping feature that first warns and then frags any player trying to camp. Imagine that one getting into *Half-Life…*

PCZVERDICT ☑
🔺 **UPPERS** Neat new features • No camping
🔻 **DOWNERS** No new maps or skins • Limited appeal

⭐⭐⭐⭒⭒
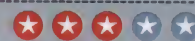
One for the LAN party or dedicated bot killer

Coliseum's anti-camping features makes it impossible to get those sneaky kills.

NO CAMPING
MOVE IN 5 SECONDS OR BE KILLED

47 ⒠ 71

LOW AMMO WARNING
You fragged Orbb
Tied for 1st place with 9

There's no shortage of action when you run *Coliseum*.

23 ⒠ 119

ZEN QUANTUM JET FIGHTERS V1.0

⭐ Requires full version of *Unreal Tournament* • Out now • www.planetunreal.com/zencoder

What *Unreal Tournament* needs is some serious hardware. *Tony Lamb* has a look round to see if he can see any

Quantum Jets is a mutator for *Unreal Tournament* and far more fun than its diminutive size suggests. When activated, players swap any of up to four weapons for a futuristic jet fighter that can then be flown around the map, releasing swarms of missiles at anyone unfortunate enough to get in the crosshairs. By default, the jet replaces the Redeemer and is picked up in the same way. Once you're in the air, just press fire to shoot, or alt-fire to eject. Simple.

Setting up *Quantum Jets* is a cinch, and it can work on any map where there is enough outdoor space to make it practical. With weapon replacements and even the amount of fuel carried configurable from the mods drop-down and the mutator available for any multiplayer or single-player game (bots make great cannon-fodder), this makes for a quick route to some serious carnage. There's unlimited ammo and a fast rate of fire too.

Sadly, bots won't use it, if you fancy a dogfight you'll need a human opponent. Alternatively, a team deathmatch or CTF would take on a whole new element with a big outdoors map and a couple of players on each side as 'air support'. Stuka and P51 models are in the pipeline too. WWII map anyone?

PCZVERDICT ☑
🔺 **UPPERS** Great fun • Easy configuration • Works on any outdoors map
🔻 **DOWNERS** Only one model so far • Needs a new HUD • Bots can't use it • There's not a lot of online support

⭐⭐⭐⭒⭒
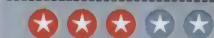
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Not the best-looking jet in the world but it packs a hefty punch.

32   27

You can't destroy a Quantum fighter until someone is flying it.

Hitting the fire button unleashes a fearsome stream of missiles.
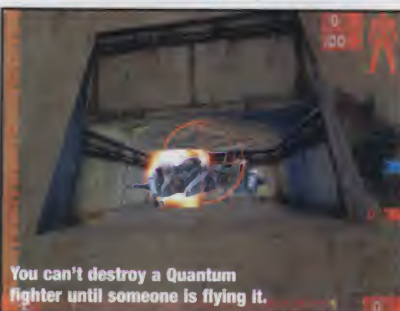
PLAY FOR FREE AT THE PLAYING FIELDS

The **PlayingFields**

1 HOUR FREE WORTH £6

The **PlayingFields**

DISCOUNT SLIP

Name .... Date Of Birth ....

Address ....

....

Email Address ....

Tel No .... Date ....

★ This discount slip entitles one person to play for one hour free of charge on one occasion between November 15 and December 12, 2001, at The Playing Fields, 143 Whitfield Street, London W1. You must be 14 years of age or older in order to participate in this offer. The slip must be filled in correctly and must be the original from a copy of *PC ZONE*, otherwise it will not be valid. Not to be used in conjunction with any other offer. Only one slip per reader per issue.

A gamer's paradise, The Playing Fields is a computer games bar where you can relax and play games the way they are meant to be played – with someone else. Just a 30-second walk away from Warren Street Tube station (Northern and Victoria lines), you can find it at 143 Whitfield Street, London W1.

Once there, you can jump on one of the 23 state-of-the-art machines on offer, and either play via a network or over the Net on games such as *Counter-Strike, Unreal Tournament, Giants, Delta Force: Land Warrior, Sacrifice, Rune* and many others. Each machine boasts an AMD 1.1GHz processor, 128Mb SDRAM, a 17in monitor and a NVIDIA Geforce 2 GTS graphics card – no less.

You have to be aged at least 14 to play and ID may be required. The Playing Fields is open seven days a week from noon to 11pm (10pm on Sundays). For prices and more information, check out www.theplayingfields.co.uk.

And for a free hour of play, simply fill in the slip (to the left of this page) and take it along with you to The Playing Fields.

The **PlayingFields**

FREE-FOR-ALL

Monday Dec 3, 2001
7:00 – 10.00pm

COUNTER-STRIKE: TWO SERVERS

PC ZONE Free-For-All

GETTING CONNECTED

Get ready for some hot fragging action

Not in the main challenge? You can still get your arses whipped by joining the Free-For-All. Due to the massive popularity of our Counter-Strike server and the frustration experienced by many of you while trying to get a game over the last couple of Free-For-Alls, we've decided to run two Counter-Strike servers instead of just one. Which means double the chance of getting a go.

To join the *Counter-Strike* FFA, from the opening *Counter-Strike* menu click 'Play CS' then 'Internet Games' and 'Filter'. Check the box for 'Are In My Favourites List' and uncheck the other boxes.

Now click 'Filter' again, and click 'Add Server' then type: 195.149.48.59:27016 to join the first server or 195.149.48.58:27016 to join the second one. You should now see a server called 'PC ZONE Challenge' listed on your screen. Double click on this server to join it. The password is *pczone*.

Servers will be available for practice from 12noon. Maps will cycle every 15 minutes to allow everyone a chance to play, so keep trying. If you have any problems connecting, telephone 020 7388 0004 on the day of the challenge.

HAVE A GO

PCZONE GAME SERVER

Provided by www.games-world.net

The *PC ZONE* game servers are now more popular than ever and to ensure only *PC ZONE* readers can play on them, we've decided to password them all. Don't worry though, every month we'll be printing the password you need to get fragging.

Quake III: Arena Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.24.27966
Quake III: Fortress Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.24.27968

Counter-Strike Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.49:27015
Counter-Strike Public Server #2 – 194.93.134.49:27020
Counter-Strike Public Server #3 – 194.93.134.51:27015
Counter-Strike Public Server #4 (*PC ZONE* map pack)
– 194.93.134.51:27020

Unreal Tournament Public Server #1 –
194.93.134.52:7787
Unreal Tournament Public Server #2 – 194.93.134.52:7777

Team Fortress Classic Public Server #1
– 194.93.134.50:27015
Team Fortress Classic Public Server #2 – 194.93.134.50:27020

Password: brick

AN ADRENALINE PUMPED
ACTION ADVENTURE

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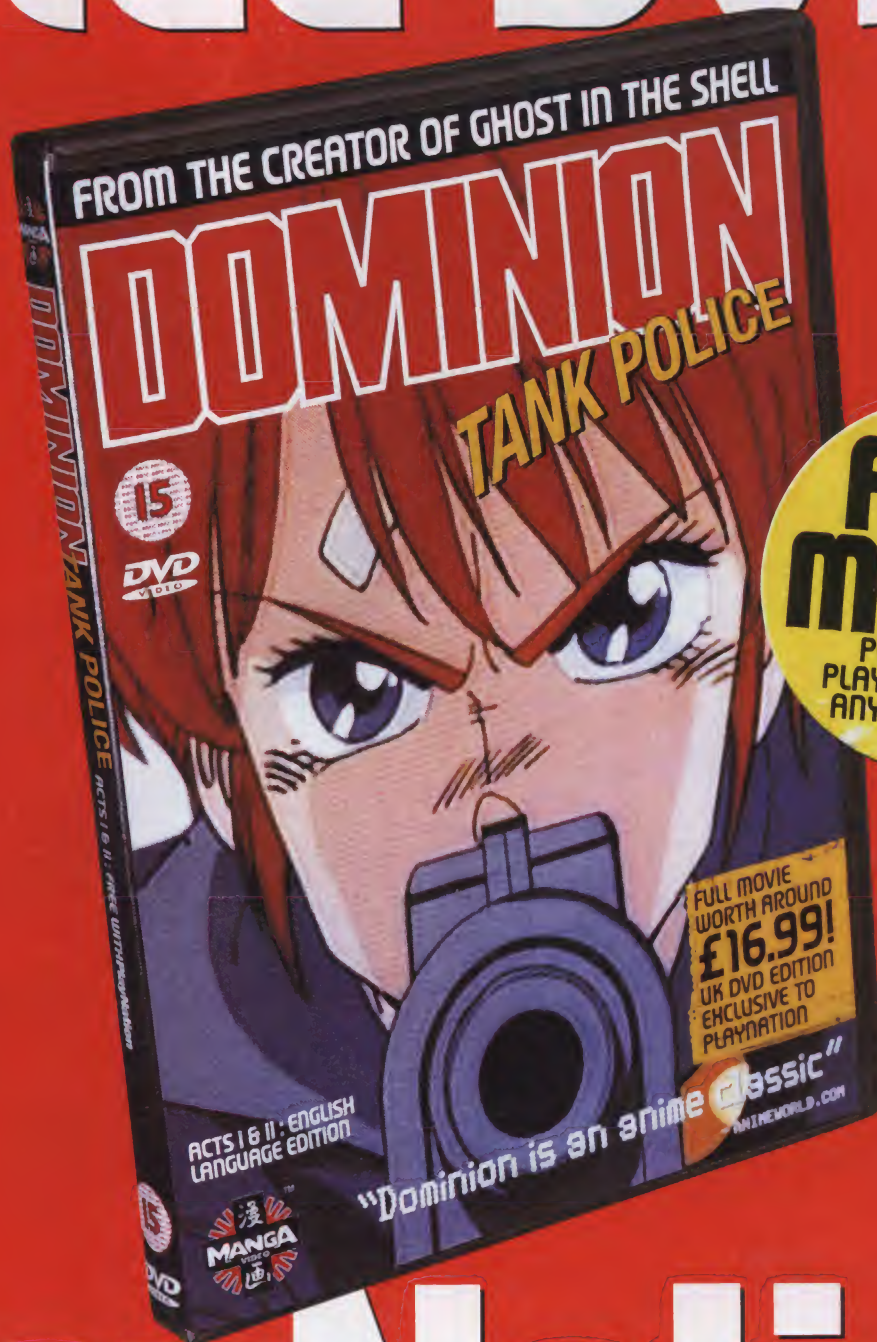
BUDGET ZONE

Christmas is a time for receiving lots, and giving cheap budget games in return

⭐ **CHEAPSKATES** Korda, Pratchett, Shoemaker and Woods

DEUS EX

⭐ £12.99 • Eidos • Out now

BEST BUY

Z PCZONE CLASSIC

For 99.7 per cent of the world's population, *Deus Ex* was the game of 2000. An epic freeform RPG/shooter, *Deus Ex* delivered stealth, suspense, atmosphere and brains in one involving package, and smashed the previous benchmark *System Shock 2* into submission. Playing as JC Denton, it's your job to unravel the twisting plot, which is housed in the sumptuous *Unreal* engine, and blessed with a real-world physics model and environment modelling that makes it possible to interact with almost everything you encounter in any way you wish.

Typically, for a game that unites almost every games journalist on the planet, it failed to sell as many copies as it should have done, and if you're one of the offenders (and we mean that most sincerely) then there's absolutely no excuse to ignore the masterpiece now that it's available for £13. Stick it on your Christmas list and buy it for two friends, with instructions that they have to buy it for two of theirs. Hopefully, with such dubious chain-marketing in operation the whole world will be playing come 2002.

PCZ VERDICT   **94%**

"How about you, have you got a light?"

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before?"

The 7.24 leaves Portsmouth harbour with its usual quota of carriages.

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

⭐ LucasArts Classic • £14.99 • Out now

You're in charge of the world's favourite archaeologist, who's searching for the mythical Tower of Babel and the supernatural artefact, the Infernal Machine. Set in the '50s during the early stages of the Cold War, you find yourself battling against insurmountable odds as you race against the Ruskies to find said contraption. At the time, *The Infernal Machine* was a superb return to form for a then rather beleaguered LucasArts, and has survived the test of time far better than any of Croft's outings.

PCZ VERDICT   **83%**

Bloody rabbits. It's all they ever think about.

DAY OF THE TENTACLE / SAM AND MAX HIT THE ROAD

⭐ Lucas Arts Classic • £15.99 • Out now

Two classic LucasArts adventures from the days when adventure games were actually taxing and had the rare quality of being genuinely funny. In *Day Of The Tentacle* you played a whacked-out bunch of friends who are recruited by Dr Fred to thwart the plans of his runaway creation, the evil purple tentacle. *Sam and Max Hit* *The Road* features more insane characters, including a rabbit/wolverine-type creature on the trail of the sasquatch. Somewhat dated, but still two of the best adventure games ever made.

PCZ VERDICT   **75%**

Carnage, carnage, carnage, carnage. We love it.

SERIOUS SAM: THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

⊙ £9.99 • Take Advantage • Out now

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE It's ironic that Take 2 has decided to call its budget label Take Advantage, seeing as we were forced to pay twice as much for *Serious Sam* as our friends in the US. The pricing furore obviously affected sales of the game, which was always planned as a mid-price release, and this was a shame because *Serious Sam*, while not breaking new ground in the world of first-person-shooting, was one of the most entertaining games of the year. Still, that's all water under the bridge now, especially as Take 2 has made amends in a big way, releasing the almost-new game for less than a tenner.

Taking the *Doom* philosophy to its limits, it poured a relentless stream of huge and/or amusing creatures at you, which you had to aim an assortment of impressive weaponry at. The levels never moved beyond linear progression, but it didn't matter. The 3D engine moved the game into a different realm, with an amazing line of sight, and monstrous laser battles that had you ducking and weaving in your seat. At this price, it's an essential stocking-filler.

PCZVERDICT 82%

Now why would you be want to be playing *Starfleet Command 1*?

STAR TREK: COMMANDER'S EDITION

⊙ £29.99 • Interplay • Out now

Three *Star Trek* games for the price of one here, which means if you're not a fan, you would have to be something of an idiot to pick up this compilation. In fact, even fans are likely to be a little disappointed since the first game on offer, *Starfleet Command*, is instantly irrelevant thanks to the inclusion of its marginally better sequel, *Empires At War*. Both good tactical starship combat games that they are, only a dimwit would profess to playing both. The third game, *Star Trek: New Worlds*, is the worst of the three, by quite a long way, in fact. Rather tedious 3D real-time land-based strategy is the idea, and not one best suited to the universe in which it's set.

All in all then, considering you don't get any manuals (as usual they're in Acrobat format on a CD), you'd be better off picking up *Starfleet Command Volume II* from a bargain bin on its own.

PCZVERDICT 62%

COLIN MCRAE 2

⊙ £12.99 • Codemasters' Best Sellers • Out now

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE Christmas is always the best time for budget releases, but with *Deus Ex*, *Serious Sam* and *Colin McRae 2* all being released, there's definitely a case to be argued for overkill. How big do they think our stockings are?

Put bluntly, if you've got an interest in cars and you want to check out the current benchmark for rally games then *Colin* is your man. It's pure rallying, which means that you're the only car on the track (with the exception of the bonus Arcade mode), up against a series of stage times posted by imaginary AI drivers, but the physics model and graphics, and the number of details the Codeys have crammed in means that it's still one of the most involving games on four wheels ever.

This month also sees the release of its best challenger to date, *Rally Championship Xtreme* (see review on p70), which is almost as good in every respect, but with better graphics. If you want to stretch your graphics card and you've got the cash, that's probably the better choice now, but in terms of the game/cash equation, *Colin McRae* is still number one.

Carrrrrmmm on, move it.

PCZVERDICT 85%

ONI

⊙ Take Advantage • £9.99 • Out now

Oni has some great fighting sequences and nice animation but unfortunately, it's not the game it could have been. It's incredibly shallow in both plot and gameplay, and although the buildings and scenery look well designed from the outside, you can't escape the feeling of emptiness once you get inside. Fighting your way through to the next level, is pretty much the core of the game, and the only reason you persevere is to find out the new moves, which you learn as you gain more experience. The lack of any real challenge and the fact that there is only an automatic save-game feature will frustrate and dissuade a lot of players. In the end *Oni* is only halfway to being a great game.

Help me. I've got a light bulb stuck on my leg.

PCZVERDICT 65%

Gaming at its dullest.

MYST
✪ Focus • £9.99 • Out now

Last issue we reviewed *Myst III: Exile*, a slow-paced, uninspirational and cumbersome adventure game that looked great but played worse than an album of Right Said Fred B-sides. And apart from a few tweaks and some improved graphics, it was almost indiscernible from this original. *Myst*'s gameplay consists of little more than moving between a set of static locations and solving a few puzzles, which range from the pathetically easy to the mind-liquifyingly impossible. Both have very little character interaction, non-existent atmosphere and absolutely no replayability factors whatsoever. So the only notable difference of any worth is the £20 price gap. You can probably work the rest out for yourselves.

PCZVERDICT   **35%**

Stop Rebel scum!

STAR WARS: EPISODE I THE PHANTOM MENACE
✪ £14.99 • LucasArts Classic • Out now

Not too bad, but nowhere near one of LucasArts' best. It didn't help of course that this game was so closely tied in with the film of the same name, that it came across more as an interactive marketing tool than a real game. Innovations are few and although the graphics are clean and crisp and there's plenty to do, the gameplay is akin to being a diminutive clone of *Tomb Raider*. As an adventure there's no real sense of freedom and as an action game there's little to get the pulse racing. A lack of credible voice-acting marred the experience, but what was most disappointing about this game in retrospect was that it marked the beginning of LucasArt's darkest days, days best forgotten.

PCZVERDICT   **57%**

HEXEN II
✪ £9.99 • Focus • Out now

When *ZONE* was half the age it is now, *Hexen II* came along and rocked our pages. Powered by the *Quake* engine, it was a superb stopgap until *Quake II* came along, briefly halting work with its fantasy FPS action offering three very different classes of character to play as. Today it looks very, very old and aside from some imaginative weapons, the gameplay feels just as dated. But we forget that this one-time masterpiece was from the studios of Raven, who have since created *Star Trek Voyager*, *Soldier Of Fortune* and the nearly ready *Jedi Knight II*. If you're a fan of Raven's work, then a fiver's a fair price for a visit to one of its ancient relics.

You don't see many giant scorpions in games these days.

PCZVERDICT   **67%**

STAR WARS: EPISODE I RACER
✪ £14.99 • LucasArts Classic • Out now

Not all of LucasArts' end-of-the-century *Star Wars* games were a complete washout. Though still below par compared to past glories, *Racer* was and still is a rather fun little game. In the same way that the game is based on the one good scene in the original film, *Racer* is the best of the crop of LucasArts' *Episode I* games (which isn't saying much). For a racing game there is a real sense of speed and thanks to some great sounds (and that music), we can certainly recommend this budget release to anyone with a love of games like *WipeOut*. Saying that, £15 is a bit steep.

A fair sense of speed in what is really a console racer.

PCZVERDICT   **68%**

Not pretty is it.

STAR WARS: FORCE COMMANDER
✪ £14.99 • LucasArts Classic • Out now

OK, hands up, it's a fair cop. You got us bang to rights and no mistake. *Farce Commander* is unrelenting muck and for us to have praised it so much upon its release just goes to show how far the soundtrack swayed us, which as always, is magnificent. Good too was the way the missions serviced the entire *Star Wars* trilogy. But the poor interface – still perhaps the worst ever seen – together with botched graphics and woeful AI mean that even the most loyal *Star Wars* fan will be terminally disappointed. This is not the game you're looking for.

PCZVERDICT   **48%**

Ahhh, aren't they cute… no.

SETTLERS III
✪ Focus • £9.99 • Out now

Essentially more of the same that made the first two *Settlers* games such big hits. You have to manage a complex web of dependence and production lines as you guide your little village of chubby cartoonish settlers (you can play as one of three different races, the Asians, Romans and Egyptians), through the rigours of day-to-day life. You must maintain a fine balance between keeping your people fed, watered and armed, while taking over nearby enemy territories. Maybe a bit too cutesy and simplistic for hardcore RTS fans, it's still the next best thing to hibernation.

PCZVERDICT   **70%**
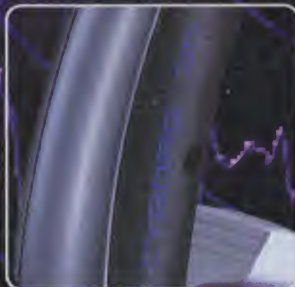
FEEDBACK

Ho, ho, ho, ho. Ho, ho, ho, ho. Ho, ho, ho, ho. *Martin Korda* sifts through his Christmas mailbag and answers your latest babblings about games, Communism and sheep

RED FACTION
REVIEWED *PCZ* #108, Nov 2001
SCORE 73%
What we said
Volition's game is remarkable only for what it attempts rather than what it achieves. And so *Red Faction* can be summed up thus: a first-person shooter, where you can sometimes blow holes in the scenery, with designs on being the best PC action game since *Half-Life*, but in fact it isn't.
What you thought
○ I have just quit from one of the worst games I've ever played, *Red Faction*, the game you gave 73% to. Are you mad? Up until now, I've sometimes been dubious about some of your reviews, but usually after testing them, I end up completely agreeing with you. This however, takes the biscuit. To its credit, though, the Geomod technology is nothing short of amazing. I spent a whole hour blasting a hole in the wall. It goes on forever. And the glass is also a masterpiece of programming. Place a bomb next to a glass window and detonate it. Then watch the glass fly everywhere.

Right, now that the good stuff is out of the way, let's get to the bad bits, and yes there are lots of them. Firstly the AI is some of the worst I've ever seen. I think I could honestly say it's on a par with *Doom*. All the enemies seem to do is duck, run one step away, turn, duck and shoot again. If that's average AI then surely *Half-Life*'s AI is close to being lifelike.

Another thing is that the level design is awful, and as for the beginning, what's going on there? After finishing my shift in the mines, I saw two men shouting, and suddenly a scuffle broke out and everyone was attacking me. What's going on?

The game constitutes little more than walking through corridor after corridor shooting some of the worst enemies in gaming history. If you want my advice, avoid this game. The only thing going for it is the Geomod technology, which hopefully Mod makers will pick up and use to make a game that *Red Faction* could have been.

*Cl()wnSt:)p[]0er
(AKA Lewis Burnell)*

○ *Red Faction* is a very important game, not only for the games industry, but for our society too. All too often, games ignore the importance of politics and real-world issues. However, *Red Faction* is the exception to this rule and I hope that others will follow its example.

Comparisons to *Total Recall* are inevitable, due to the Mars setting and the idea of the repression of the working classes by greedy multinational corporations. The subsequent revolt by the lead character represents the struggle within society to break free of capitalism. As an FPS, it is almost unparalleled in terms of action, while the Geomod technology is nothing short of breathtaking, and with its political subplot (which you grossly neglected in your review), must go down as one of the most groundbreaking and influential games of our time.

James Beatie
Comment
I'm afraid that I can't really agree totally with either of you, especially you James.

> **All too often, games ignore the importance of politics and real-world issues. However, *Red Faction* is the exception to this rule**
>
> JAMES BEATIE ON *RED FACTION*

If you want to read political statements against oppressive capitalist regimes, then go and read *Pinko Monthly*, comrade. We review games here, and we talk about how fun they are, not their contribution towards inciting a bloody revolution. Anyway, we like our P4s, minidisk players and 28in flat-screen TVs too much to even consider encouraging one.

Lewis, you seem a little harsh on the game, but I do agree with some of your points. The early enemy AI is verging on the ludicrously stupid, but I can assure you that things get a hell of a lot tougher later on. And, while the story didn't confuse us quite as much as it appears to have vexed you, we did find it eminently forgettable. Basically, *Red Faction* is somewhat of a disappointment, and if you took away the Geomod technology, it would be little more than a decidedly average shooter.

ANACHRONOX
REVIEWED *PCZ* #105, Aug 2001
SCORE 83%
What we said
I wouldn't be at all surprised if many people cast *Anachronox* on the *Daikatana* bonfire, blinkered by its obvious roots and its dated graphics. Others may decide that it's one of the best and funniest RPGs ever made. Both conclusions would be wrong. But for all its flaws, this is still a great game that deserves to be given a chance.
What you thought
○ I have just completed *Anachronox* and it turned out to be the most enjoyable game I have ever played. While it may not be the best technically or visually, from a gameplay perspective, it's outstanding.

The storyline is excellent, and with all the different styles of play and sub-games, it never becomes

Red Faction: If only the game had been as good as the Geomod technology...

⊕ It's not the best-looking game out there, but *Anachronox* sure has got great gameplay.

⊕ "Hello, we're Jehovah's Witnesses. Can we come in for a minute?"

boring or repetitive. The puzzles aren't so hard that they put you off the game either. There are also vast quantities of humour that add to the enjoyment. I urge everyone to give it a try. Turn a blind eye to the old style graphics for the first hour or two and enjoy the experience. Hopefully, enough people will buy *Anachronox* to ensure that the developers make a sequel.

Steve Tyler

✪ On the strength of your review I decided to purchase *Anachronox* without waiting for a demo. Luckily for me, I was far from disappointed. *Anachronox* has many nice little touches which make it so enjoyable; each character uses different weapons, so no more wasting time deciding who to equip with what; one big inventory for the whole party, making it much easier to keep track of what you've got; introduction to new items/ characters at a steady pace rather than all at once; option to save whenever you want… I could think of more, but I can't be bothered.

The story is another great feature, as it's better than both *System Shock 2*'s and *Deus Ex*'s. Overall, your review was spot on, although a higher score would have been nicer, and the two downers regarding the graphics aren't really downers at all.

Grumblejack

Comment

Anachronox, as we said in our review, is a geriatric beauty. Look past the dated visuals and the slightly console-like feel and you'll discover one of the best action adventures of the year. Sure, it would have been

great if it had looked stunning as well, but here at *PC ZONE*, we'll take great gameplay over state-of-the-art graphics any time, and from the looks of it, so will you.

SHEEP, DOG 'N' WOLF

REVIEWED *PCZ* #108, Nov 2001
SCORE 80%

What we said

It alternates between long lengths of easiness and short periods of ire-inducing frustration.

What you thought

✪ I have been playing through this for the last day or so, and am basically in agreement with all of your comments.

The main reason I am writing is to mention two points that I have found so far. One annoying bugbear seems to be the speech – the characters can't get through a sentence without the sound stuttering or breaking up. The other gripe is the inability to skip cut-scenes, such as your death scenes. Again, a minor point, but I find it frustrating that the choice to skip them isn't even there.

All in all, your review was spot on. Maybe the score was a bit high, but generally you made a good job of it.

Niall Taylor

✪ I have to strongly disagree with your review of *Sheep, Dog 'N' Wolf*. Sure, it is vaguely entertaining, but 80%? That's taking it a bit too far I think. It's just a kid's game based on a kid's cartoon and the challenge it poses simply goes towards emphasising this point. I completed it in just two days, and was bored for most of the second

one. At least it only costs £20, as charging any more would have been nothing short of daylight robbery. Contrary to the argument in your Uppers section, I did find it easy to the point of being insulting. This really isn't a game for adults. It's based around a cartoon for goodness sake. I think 65% would have been a far fairer mark for this over-rated and over easy puzzle game.

Dean Fox

✪ What a game! No, I'm not talking about *Half-Life* or *Unreal Tournament*, I'm talking about one of the most entertaining and enjoyable games I've played for quite some time, *Sheep, Dog 'N' Wolf*. If anything, I'd say that 80% was being harsh on the game, as, despite its cartoon graphics, it's a very challenging game, even for adults. For £20, me and my family enjoyed several weeks of fun-filled puzzle solving, which was not

only entertaining but varied too. I also have to disagree with your criticisms of the music, which complements the mood and feel of the game perfectly. Thank you

challenge to anyone a bit older. This is never an easy thing to achieve, and as games go, *Sheep, Dog 'N' Wolf* has managed this better than most.

> **❝I'd say that 80 per cent was being harsh on the game, as, despite its cartoon graphics, it's a challenging game, even for adults❞**
>
> R KENT ON *SHEEP, DOG 'N' WOLF*

PC ZONE for another professional assessment of a game, because others would have simply dismissed it as childish nonsense.

R Kent

Comment

Three very varied responses to this one. We have to remember that this is a game that tries to appeal to the whole family, which means it has to be easy enough for young children to get the hang of, while posing a

It's a simple and humorous puzzle game that will make you smile, one that provides enough variation to keep you coming back for more. Sure it's no classic, but all credit to the developers for moving a Warner Brothers' game away from the patronising children's games market and into the mainstream. And for £20, surely we can't complain too much, eh? 🎮
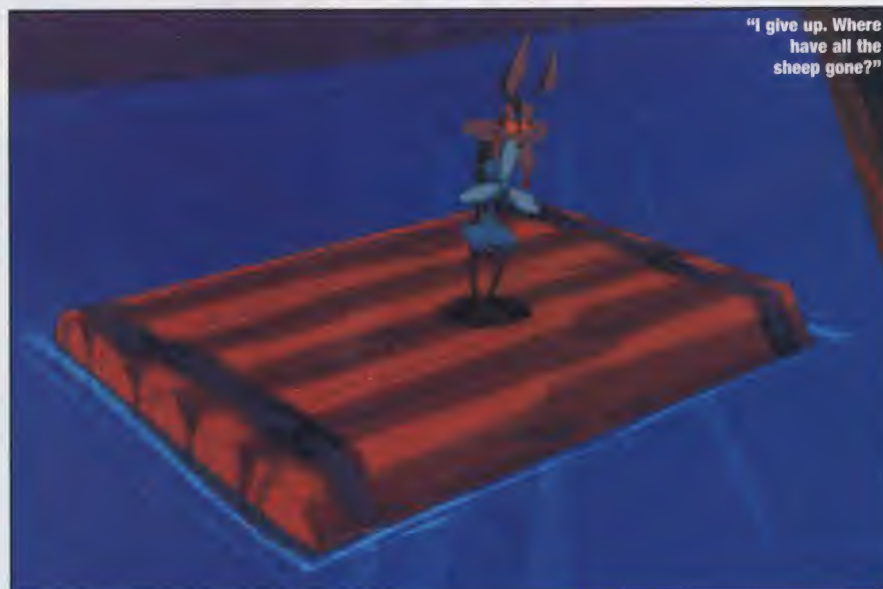
"I give up. Where have all the sheep gone?"

REALITY CHECK:

POOL

Take Jimmy White, a pool table, a couple of strippers, mix and see what happens. *Steve Hill* racks 'em up

REAL

VS

NOT REAL

I'm in the wrong job. To my right stands childhood hero Jimmy White, while to my left an exotic dancer is attempting to stick her tongue in my ear. It's the culmination of another day with my nose to the grindstone, slogging away at the unforgiving coalface of journalism to bring you, the reader, the latest in interactive entertainment. You know the drill by now. We take an activity that has appeared in game form and attempt to establish the similarities or otherwise between the real and virtual pursuits. It's by no means an exact science, but it is a reasonable excuse to get drunk with the rich and famous.

Jimmy White could loosely be described as all three, or at least he has been at various stages of his career. If you're too young to remember, or have never taken any interest in snooker, then know this: Jimmy White is a bona fide legend, and there was a time when he was arguably the most exciting sportsman in Britain. An immense natural talent, it is probably of little consolation that he is widely regarded as the greatest player never to have won the World Championship. White still occupies a respectable position in the rankings though, and bolsters his snooker income

Sporting to the last, White attempts to put Hill off his stroke.

by playing stateside pool tournaments, alongside the likes of Romford Slim, the ginger formerly known as Steve Davis.

BIG BREAK
So what is Jimmy doing breaking off against my good self of a Thursday night? Promoting some bleeding game, obviously. *Jimmy White's Cueball World* is the title in question, and regular readers will already be briefed on it. You'll also be aware of the difficulties of actually getting Jimmy White to do something that he doesn't want to do, such as turn up. Our previous appointment was a debacle, with Jimmy failing to show up at the games developer Archer McLean's Northamptonshire mansion. However, that wasn't the first time he's let me down, as on a previous assignment for *Maxim* magazine, Jimmy's absence was put down to the fact that his wife had thrown all of his belongings into their garden.

So how has Virgin Interactive managed to get Jimmy on

promotional duties today? By hosting the event in a strip club, naturally. I was even 15 minutes early myself. Spearmint Rhino on London's Tottenham Court Road is the venue, where, for the price of a mid-range PC game, one of a bevy of beauties will perform a 'mucky dance' for your

> **"He's slighty hasty, letting me in for a modest break before I bottle an easy chance"**

delectation. A quick scan of the room confirms that Jimmy is in residence, and already getting stuck into the free bar, while keeping a watchful eye on the ladies. It's a reasonable ploy, and one that I waste no time in replicating.

GAME ON
Here's the plan then. I go head to head with Jimmy White on his new game, beating him comfortably due to my superior gaming skills. The tables are then turned and Jimmy thrashes me at pool, thus proving that games are no substitute for the real thing. That's the idea, anyway, and when I put it to Jimmy he seems reasonably up for it.

In a cunning attempt at psychological tactics, I ask him if he's any good at the game?

"Not bad at the first game, I don't know about this one, I haven't played it properly yet."

Do you reckon I could beat you at the PC game, as a professional computer game player?

"Well, of course you could." Whereas you could beat me at pool?

"With my eyes shut." We'll see. "OK."

With the in-depth interview secured, let the games commence. There's a PC set up in the club, and the combined might of what seems to be Virgin's entire PR and marketing division eventually manage to lure Jimmy away from a posse of strippers and onto the game. Now I could report that it was a close game, with my technical skills eventually winning out over White's natural flamboyance.

Loser at pool... winner at life.

No wonder he lost, he was playing with his eyes shut.

But that would be a lie. White has no more played the game than I have, and if you think we are going to spend valuable drinking and letching time getting to grips with it, then you've grossly misjudged the situation. Our combined skills fail to even manage to break off, and after posing for a few pics, we give up. It looks all right though, and Jimmy is particularly impressed with the animation of the referee's hands.

POOL PARTY

The first part of the experiment has proved an abject failure, and there are now doubts over the second. Spearmint Rhino boasts many things, but a pool table is not one of them. One has been located in a pub directly over the road, though, and it might sound like a simple task to relocate. However, that is to underestimate the inherent chaos of Jimmy White, who according to one PR is by now "quite pissed," both in the American and English sense of the word. So much so that everyone seems scared to approach him.

We don't know how many PR people it takes to change a light bulb, but at a guess it would probably take five to stand around flapping ineffectually while a journalist shins up the ladder. It's left to me to invite Jimmy over the road for a game of pool, an idea that he's perfectly happy to go along with, providing he can take a couple of strippers along. He also thinks that we should take the Spearmint Rhino stretch limo, although the folly of getting into a car to simply perform a U-turn is eventually realised.

TWO OF OUR STRIPPERS ARE MISSING

Emerging blinking into the sunlight, we scurry into the pub, where early evening drinkers are bemused at the sight of Jimmy White with a pair of strippers in tow. The cameraman has already set up, but Jimmy refuses to pose until his sidekick, pool professional and world trick shot champion, Jelly Baby, has performed three trick shots for the ladies. The last of these is an impressive feat, involving potting one ball into each pocket with a single stroke.

With strippers and onlookers suitably impressed, Jimmy and I pose for a few shots, such as him potting the black, the idea being to make up the story of his easy victory later. These pictures are rendered redundant though, when

HOW REAL ARE POOL GAMES?

Cue or mouse?

Neither CueBall World or...
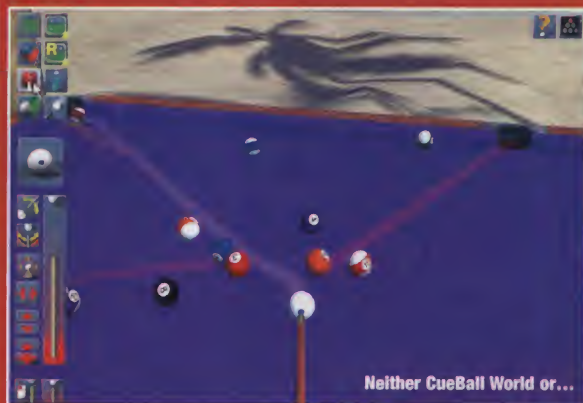
JW'S CUEBALL WORLD

Whereas pool games can accurately replicate the physics of the balls, they can never actually come close to the feeling of having a cue in your hand. Likewise, being good at pool games is no guarantee of success at the real thing. As Jimmy White says, "It's like golf, you can watch a golf video or something, but you've got to go to the basics first. You can't just pick up a cue from watching it on a PC."

...Virtual Pool 3 will make you a better pub pool player.

VIRTUAL POOL 3

So what is the main difference then? "It's stance and everything, your action and looking into the cue ball, eye to hand co-ordination."

He's absolutely right, of course, and no matter how realistic games get, they'll never replicate a bunch of leering blokes gathered around a pool table, pissing away their money in a series of ill-advised wagers. Which could be a good thing.

Jimmy perks up and offers to play me for real. Now, I'm no great pool player, as Dave Woods will attest, having walked off 50 quid the richer following my last game of any consequence. If ever there was a mismatch, this is it, and

Jimmy immediately establishes a lead from the break off. However, he is slightly hasty, letting me in for a modest break before I bottle an easy chance. A further exchange sees me sink the cue ball, at which point Jimmy decides

to break off from on top of the cushion. His flamboyance goes unrewarded though, and after potting the white himself, I am amazingly left with a simple black for victory. With my heart beating like a mother, I address the ball,

check my angles, and sink it. I have beaten Jimmy White.

When I remind him of his earlier boast, Jimmy claims, "Well, I let you win on purpose because you looked after me." He would say that. PCZ

JIMMY WHITE'S CUEBALL WORLD

This is Jimmy's world. We just live on it

The third instalment of *Jimmy White's Cueball* series is almost ready and I got to experience it first hand. So will it be able to make you a better player? Jimmy?

"No."

Thanks. Any other thoughts?

"It shows you some trick shots on there that you've never seen before, so you can copy the game and play the trick shots live."

The game also showcases a series of bizarre locations, with tables appearing in such odd places as Stonehenge, the Maldives, and Hong Kong. Which is all very well, but totally unrealistic. As we have seen, Jimmy White's world consists of strip clubs and upstairs rooms of West End boozers. We demand a Spearmint Rhino add-on immediately.

Smile and they might not notice we have no idea what we're doing.

PC ZONE

COMING NEXT ISSUE

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

UNREAL 2

The most talked about and most technologically advanced game in development today. We play the latest code and talk at length with the developers – only in next month's *PC ZONE*

MOST WANTED 2002

A look forward to the biggest and best games coming our way in 2002. Read up on

STAR WARS GALAXIES, DEUS EX 2, DUKE NUKEM FOREVER, HALO, CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4, JEDI OUTCAST, GRAND THEFT AUTO III, MEDAL OF HONOR, COLIN McRAE RALLY 3, MAFIA, FREELANCER, HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, DOOM III, QUAKE IV, ELITE IV, SAM & MAX 2, LORD OF THE RINGS, HALF-LIFE 2 AND MANY, MANY MORE

REVIEWED
**RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
CIVILIZATION III COMANCHE 4
BATTLE REALMS STAR WARS:
STARFIGHTER AQUANOX FLIGHT SIM
2002 SOUL REAVER 2 RALLY TROPHY**

FULLY PLAYABLE DEMOS
**TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON
FRANK HERBERT'S DUNE
BATTLE REALMS
POOL OF RADIANCE
STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER**

ON SALE THURSDAY DECEMBER 13

"THE BEST WAR GAME EVR

International Bestseller: No.1 United Kingdom.. No.1 United States.. No.1 Germany..

FULLY UPGRADED

NEW

RED HAMMER™
THE SOVIET CAMPAIGN

Red Hammer - the Soviet Campaign

When the US campaign is complete, join the revolution and fight on the side of the Soviet force through this additional 20-mission comrades-and-communism storyline.

Operation Flashpoint Gold Edition. The winter survival kit for military gamers, now loaded with extra supplies. The original No.1 Bestseller game is fully upgraded with unbeatable multiplayer action and new vehicles, weapons and missions. The box set comes complete with…

PC CD

• Fly or drive over 40 vehicles.   • Massive online multiplayer action.   • Tactical squad or solo gameplay.

WIN!

COMPETITION

intel inside

pentium 4

WIN AN INTEL PENTIUM 4 1.8GHZ PC!

Intel has turned all Santa Claus and emptied its sack in the *ZONE* office. Read on and win some prizes…

Christmas is a time for celebration, a time for giving, and more importantly, receiving all the latest games. But what if your PC's not up to the job? The way we see it you've got two choices: suck your cheeks in, lock your door and cancel the whole thing – or enter our festive competition and win yourself a brand new whizz-bang system courtesy of the generous blokes at Intel.

The centrepiece of the system is the brand new Intel Pentium 4 1.8GHz processor, which provides games performance with baubles – it comes with optimisation code for all the biggest games including *Black & White* and *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force*. Surrounding this you'll find the latest components, including a 19-inch monitor, a stupidly huge 100Gb hard drive,

CD-RW drive and the card that everyone wants and no-one can afford, the 64Mb GeForce 3.

We've only got one of these to send out, but in keeping with the spirit of Christmas we've also got an Intel MP3 player and an Intel Pocket PC digital camera. The MP3 player comes complete with 128Mb of memory, a digital FM tuner and superb sound quality. We reviewed it in issue 107, loved it (four *ZONE* stars out of five), and have been trying to avoid the calls from Intel's Returns department ever since. Third prize is the compact digital camera that lets you snap up to 256 images on the move, or a minute of video with sound.

Last year we didn't receive any Christmas cards and were left feeling particularly empty and unloved. In a desperate bid to

ensure this doesn't happen again, all you have to do to be in with a chance of winning is send us the most OTT festive card you can find, with your name, address, email address and telephone number inside, place it in an envelope and send it in to us at: **Intel PC Competition,** *PC ZONE*, **30 Cleveland Street, London, W1P 5FF. The closing date is Wednesday 12 December. We'll spend a day marvelling at how popular we are, before selecting the winning three.**

✪ Terms and conditions: only entries that satisfy the entry criteria and received before the closing date will be entered. Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The Editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply. And all that. Phew!

SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY PLAYER

Creative Labs has enjoyed a comparative stranglehold on the mainstream soundcard market since the launch of the first Sound Blaster cards in the early '90s. *Tim Ponting* investigates whether the latest incarnation, Audigy, will continue the trend...

PC ZONE BEST BUY

For the last three or so years, Creative Labs' Sound Blaster Live! range has dominated the soundcard market. At the time of its launch, its features were remarkable. The EMU10K1 chip at its heart was hugely powerful, offered good audio quality and crucially, worked well for a variety of different applications, from music to gaming. Though Aureal, and then Sensaura, were later considered to have offered increasingly impressive 3D audio solutions, games that made full use of the technology came slowly. With Environmental Audio extensions (EAX), Creative Labs gave Live! a

much needed tonic, though it didn't take the competition long to catch up with full support for both EAX 1.0 and 2.0. However, Live! has looked increasingly vulnerable in the last year, and Audigy is clearly a vital product for Creative. On the face of it, it seems more evolutionary than revolutionary...

AUDIGY: BEHIND THE MARKETING HYPE

Audigy is branded a 24-bit/96KHz soundcard, in theory up there with products designed for professional music use, and it can indeed output a digital signal at this resolution. However, internally, the card works with audio streams at 48KHz, with

recording of analogue sources also taking place at 16-bit/48KHz. On the face of it, this may seem a con, but in reality offers substantial benefits in the real world – and let's face it, even musicians hardly ever work in 24-bit/96KHz. When mixing 16-bit/48KHz audio streams together inside a soundcard, a processor that operates at 24-bit/96KHz has considerably more digital headroom, resulting in a final output that is far better quality than a card that operates internally at a maximum resolution of 16-bit/48KHz. So while Audigy may be passing itself off as something it's not, it's certainly a step beyond Live! and all its competitors.

Audigy also sports a signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) in excess of 100dB, greater than the Live!'s dubious figure of 96dB. This is definitely of great interest to musicians who will benefit from the improvement, but for gamers it'll make very little difference when listening to gibs being scattered around a battlefield. But laudable, nonetheless.

AUDIGY NEEDS NO HYPE

The truth of the matter is that Creative needs hooks for its marketing campaign. In reality, Audigy is a fabulous product on its own terms. Basically, it's a Sound Blaster Live! with lots of small, but vital, knobs on.

CONNECTIONS AND BUNDLE

Creative has always offered a generous bundle and its utilities are generally excellent

Here's what you get with the Audigy Player:
Creative Software Audio HQ, Creative Recorder, Creative TaskBar, Creative Surround Mixer, Creative PlayCenter 3, Creative WaveStudio, Creative Oozic Player, Creative Diagnostics.
3rd Party Software Giants (full version), Arturia's Storm – Player Edition, MixMeister Technology's MixMeister 3.03, Unibrain S.A.'s FireNet 2.x, iM Networks Inc.'s iM Tuner (Internet radio).
Connectivity Joystick/MIDI port, Analogue/Digital Out jack for Analogue Center & Subwoofer or 6-channel SPDIF Output, Line in, Microphone in, Line level out (Front)/Headphone out, Line level out (Rear), SB1394™ port, Telephone Answering Device in, Analogue CD Audio in, Digital CD Audio in, Internal SB1394™ header to AudigyDrive (upgrade option), Expansion header to the AudigyDrive (upgrade option).

Creative offers it in three flavours in Europe: the basic Player card (perfect for gamers and the one we're looking at) and the Platinum and Platinum eX, aimed squarely at musicians. The former has a unit similar to the old Live!Drive, a bunch of muso-related connections that sits in a box in a spare 5.25 inch drive bay, the latter the same but in an external unit, rather like the external box supplied with Hercules' GameTheater. It's worth noting that if you use your PC much for DVD playback, the Platinum options are supplied with a remote control for controlling multimedia playback thanks to an IR sensor in the internal/external AudigyDrive unit.

STICK IT IN, TURN IT ON

Installation took place with no problems, and in a PC stuffed to the gills with nasty potential conflicts – a second soundcard, SCSI and an MPEG decoder.

Connecting your speakers is fiddlier, since Audigy offers full 5.1 audio out of the box (see Cinema Verite box-out for more on the DVD side).

Fired up in anger, Audigy is impressive. Creative claims to have cleaned up its 3D audio act,

> ❝ Installation took place with no problems, in a PC stuffed with potential conflicts ❞

and it's certainly an improvement over Live!, but not by a massive margin. I still feel Sensaura's 3D audio for headphones works better. With full 4.1 speakers however, Audigy comes into its own, with good 3D positioning on all axes. The reverb algorithms used by EAX have also been tweaked, and *Unreal Tournament* and *Rogue Spear* both sounded marginally more convincing than on my Live! card used for comparative testing. Since Live! already has my favourite EAX implementation, with Philips'

expensive Acoustic Edge a close second, there's no surprise here.

Creative Labs has made a lot of the new 'EAX Advanced HD' features of the Audigy. As with NVIDIA's GeForce 3, it will take a while for some of these benefits to filter through in games, but with Creative's power in the development community, it shouldn't take long. Advanced HD encompasses a number of improvements. Multi-environment support will probably be the most audible of them – at the moment, EAX can only produce reverb effects for a single environment at a time. HD, however, supports four simultaneously. In other words, sound from up to four different environments around you will gain reverberation effects according to their origin. This, on paper at least, is fantastic.

Secondly, Advanced HD will morph smoothly between different environments. Currently, you suddenly pop from one to another, even if the visual cues around suggest that a more gradual transformation would be more appropriate. Next up is panning of reverb effects – you will be able to distinguish the direction from which different reverberant sound originate.

Since the demise of Aureal and its A3D 2.0 and 3.0 standards, no card has since offered so-called wavetracing and occlusion effects. The former takes account of the first few reflections experienced by a sound before it hits the listener

and how that changes its character and positioning. The second models the effect of placing obstacles between the sound and the listener. HD now offers an implementation for both – a welcome return of these excellent features.

IT'S ON FIREWIRE

Creative made the exceptionally smart decision of including an IEEE 1394 FireWire socket on the card/AudigyDrive. FireWire is a superfast alternative to USB, and numerous external peripherals are now available with FireWire interfaces such as DV cameras and CDRs, both of which we tested with no problems. The Audigy version is not 'true' FireWire, in that it only supplies a maximum of 2 Watts power, but Creative has designated it SB1394 and the company is hoping manufacturers of FireWire peripherals will mark the SB1394 compatibility on their packaging.

You can also network PCs together using FireWire cabling to create an ad hoc LAN of up to 63 PCs, though typically you're unlikely to get more than a handful of users with these cards! Network performance is likely to be excellent as FireWire has plenty of bandwidth to play with.

CONCLUSION

Audigy is a fabulous product and a worthy successor to Live!. It may not be as revolutionary as Live! was at launch, but is a far stronger all-round product from day one. Bar a few driver issues already noted for Windows 2000 users, Audigy is stable, performs and sounds better than Live!, and has more useful features. It's the ultimate entry-level musician's card and an excellent option for gamers and home cinema enthusiasts. In fact, it's our new Best Buy! **PCZ**

⊕ Pay double and you get all this as well...

CINEMA VERITE

The Audigy passes our screen test...

There are several reasons why Audigy is a good choice for home cinema applications. Firstly, it offers Dolby Digital decoding at driver level; provided your DVD playback software will pass the S/P-DIF digital output to the soundcard, the drivers will decode it and send to the appropriate 5.1 channels. This means you can buy marginally cheaper DVD software, as you don't need a version that decodes Dolby Digital itself. DD decoding at driver level may also prove useful for future games that offer a 5.1 encoded soundtrack.

Secondly, Audigy will sound good on systems with small satellite speakers. With conventional decoding, the low frequency channel is sent to the subwoofer and the other five to the sats. However, if the sats are small, any low frequencies in them will be lost, with an overall 'bass-light' sound. With Audigy, you can elect to send low frequencies from all six channels to your subwoofer – you can even tune the 'crossover' frequency at which this happens yourself.

Audigy offers benefits for music playback too, using a technology known as DREAM (Dynamic Repositioning of Enhanced Audio and Music). This creates a swirling effect of different frequencies around a 5.1 speaker system, even though it's only a stereo track. This is fun for parties but does your head in after a while! PlayCenter will also play back Dolby Digital music, expected to be the 'next big thing'.

PCZVERDICT

- ⊕ **MANUFACTURER** Creative Labs
- ⊕ **PRICE** Sound Blaster Audigy Player £89.99 inc VAT
  Sound Blaster Audigy Platinum £179.99
  Sound Blaster Audigy Platinum eX £239.99 inc VAT
- ⊕ **PHONE NUMBER** None
- ⊕ **WEBSITE ADDRESS**
  www.europe.creative.com

91 Sound as, erm 90 pounds

PERIPHERAL VISION

Tim Ponting stresses his USB port with more hot-swapping than a swinger's convention

EVOMOUSE

⭐ Hall Effect Technologies • £61.94 • www.evomouse.com

The Evomouse is a revolutionary controller, mounted on a fixed pad that allows you to drag it left/right and forward/back (X/Y axes), but also twist left and right, and tilt up and down, giving you two extra axes to play with. There are also four buttons and full configuration customisation software.

In use, sadly, it's a total nightmare. The mount is so stiff that you end up pressing the two side buttons constantly when strafing left and right, and as a result of having to apply so much pressure, I couldn't find a consistently comfortable sensitivity setting to avoid the cursor overshooting its destination. It also seems much happier going left or right, or up and down, but diagonally is far harder to control. To be honest, I found it almost impossible even to move the mouse pointer to an icon to click, let alone locate the cursor over a moving target. While the concept is excellent, the execution just doesn't work in its present form, though hopefully UK company HET will continue its development further.

PCZVERDICT 22%

SAITEK OPTICAL MOUSE PRO

⭐ Saitek • £89.99 • 01454 451 900 • www.saitek.co.uk

Optical mice have several advantages over their mechanical counterparts. As there are no moving parts, they are generally more reliable; nor do they require regular cleaning. Some people find the lack of a sensation as they move it disconcerting, but personally it makes no difference.

This mouse worked excellently as soon as I used it on the polished tabletop as opposed to a 'grippy' mouse pad, which simply made the mouse harder to move. Once I'd done so, the mouse was a pleasure to use, with it feeling more precise on longer mouse movements, spinning the gunsights from a target on one side of a room to the other.

It looks pretty cool too – the rim of the back of the mouse is tastefully lit in translucent blue, and a blue Saitek logo glows on top of the device. You can even configure the light to flash when new mail arrives (providing you have a POP3 email client or use Outlook).

PCZVERDICT 81%

GRAVIS XTERMINATOR FORCE

⭐ Gravis • £59.99 • 0800 252 359 • www.graviseurope.com/uk

The Gravis Xterminator Force is an innovative gamepad that takes the best of Force Feedback joystick technology and reapplies it to a handheld device. It's the sexiest looking peripheral in this round-up: sleek black and blue plastic. The D-pad has an almost flat surface, which rotates smoothly. Whether you prefer this to a stubby toadstool is a matter of taste, but it certainly gives a lot of control. The D-pad also gives joystick-style feedback – shudders and so on. This is no vibro-massage joypad, but more like a Force Feedback stick. Unfortunately, the forces are so anaemic that you often miss them.

All the control buttons (10 in all) are well placed. There's even a pair of analogue-style 'flippers' on the underside, rather than switches – ideal for acceleration and braking. This is a top product – if you can stomach the price.

PCZVERDICT 79%

THRUSTMASTER FIRESTORM DUAL POWER GAMEPAD

⭐ Thrustmaster • £24.99 • 020 8665 1881 • www.thrustmaster.co.uk

Thrustmaster's latest joypad is a Force Feedback device of the vibro-massage variety – the love of console players worldwide. It's got two analogue controllers on stalks, an eight-way digital direction pad, 12 programmable buttons – the works. Thrustmaster has got the ergonomics of their pads down to a fine art – even if they're not that attractive. The six flippers on the underside fit your hands perfectly.

We found it better than the Gravis at controlling the exceptionally difficult racer *Mercedes Benz Truck Racing*, mainly because the toadstool was more to our taste than the flat pad. The Force Feedback effects are as good as any pad with twin motors, but without the range of expression that the Gravis can recreate with its D-pad.

As ever, Thrustmaster's software is a breeze to use. Overall, this is a great pad at an excellent price, and should be a perfect accompaniment for a variety of games.

PCZVERDICT 82%

SAITEK CYBORG 3D FORCE

⭐ Saitek • £29.99 • 01454 451 900
• www.saitek.co.uk

Makers of our favourite non-Force Feedback joystick, the Cyborg 3D Gold, offer a rather meaty, fully-programmable FF device in the 3D Force. We tested these sticks with *Crimson Skies*, a top game with excellent FF effects. The 3D Force is self calibrating, but we found it rarely had an accurate centre point, requiring a rather lopsided-style of play, though this didn't hinder enjoyment much.

Designed for both left- and right-handers, it has nine buttons (all bizarrely labelled with three dots – numbers would have been more useful), an eight-way coolie hat and throttle control. For use in non-FF games you can adjust a 'spring', which gives some resistance but is not auto-centring. The buttons on the top of the stick I found a bit too close to the rear, requiring a rather bent thumb action. Still, this is a decent stick if a tad pricey, with excellent powered effects – not as strongly powered as the latest Microsoft FF stick but a good all-rounder.

PCZVERDICT   **78%**

THRUSTMASTER TOP GUN FOX 2 PRO SHOCK

⭐ Thrustmaster • £34.99 • 020 8665 1881
• www.thrustmaster.co.uk

Designed for right-handers, this stick has the immediate benefit that every control is accessible without moving your hands at all: three buttons and the throttle with your left, the remaining four buttons and coolie hat with the right. Fully programmable, the installer actually adds drivers for just about every Thrustmaster device – just in case you own them.

The Force Feedback is unusual in that it draws power from the USB socket and the motor is housed in the shaft, rather than the base. As a result, the range of sensations is limited, all based on vibrations similar to those found in a Force Feedback joypad. However, it has an adjustable, self-centring spring, which is useful for non-FF games.

Though it's not really a proper FF device, it is, however, reasonably priced at £35. It's ultimately a decent enough stick, and for the money you can't really go wrong.

PCZVERDICT   **79%**

THRUSTMASTER FORCE FEEDBACK GT

⭐ Thrustmaster • £79.99 • 020 8665 1881 • www.thrustmaster.co.uk

With a Ferrari licence, you'd expect this to be a good product – and it is. With more buttons than you can shake a stick at, all fully programmable, it's even got a coolie hat for quick glances around your car if your software supports it. The wheel action is smooth and progressive, and the Force Feedback never gets too violent without losing control: after completely trashing a car in *Midtown Madness 2*, a quick handbrake turn in an underground car park was no problem without adding any more dents, despite the juddering. If you're a rally fan, for authentic play there's an up/down gearshift as well as the ubiquitous paddle behind the wheel. And the wheel itself has a nice rubbery feel for a non-slip racing experience.

The pedals feel a bit flimsy, but are nice and progressive in action, though they slipped a bit more than others I've tried. The base of the unit is fairly large, so you need a fair bit of desk space, but it copes well with a variety of surfaces including those with bars underneath. A top product.

PCZVERDICT   **85%**

SAITEK R440 FORCE FEEDBACK WHEEL

⭐ Saitek • £89.99 • 01454 451 900 • www.saitek.co.uk

The R440 is another top-quality Force Feedback wheel, this time from the Saitek stable. It's somewhat simpler than the Thrustmaster Force Feedback GT, with fewer button combos and no gear lever – just a pair of rather spongy paddles. However, it's well built and feels reassuringly solid. The Force Feedback is very strong on maximum settings and gives you a more hair-raising ride than the GT – *Midtown Madness 2* ended up being a bucking bronco ride! You can, of course, tailor the settings and the whole shebang is completely programmable.

The pedals are excellent – a large two segment plastic base means your heels are on the unit itself, not on the floor, and as such it doesn't creep much. Their action is generally good too. The main unit is not quite as flexible with different tabletops, but it is smaller and doesn't work loose as quite as quickly as the GT. Both wheels are great, but the GT edges in to the front because of its greater flexibility and cheaper price.

PCZVERDICT   **81%**

GADGETS

More bright and shiny things to make you happy

SWANN WIRELESS MICROCAM

✪ £285 • Swann Communications • 020 8964 9111 • **www.buy.com**

The trouble with video cameras is that they're too bulky. People can spot you a mile off and stop what they're doing before you get a decent blackmail-able image. But not anymore…

No bigger than a 50 pence piece, the MicroCam has clearly been designed with the covert observer in mind. And because it's totally wireless, you can put the camera in one room and sit and watch who ever it is you're stalking in another, up to 100 metres away.

It's also very simple to use. Just attach the MicroCam and its transmitter to their power supplies, then plug the latter into your TV or monitor and away you go. And voila! Clear, colour images of the couple at number 54 brought straight to your PC screen — it brings the ancient art of curtain-twitching into a whole new dimension.

And for the seriously disturbed, the MicroCam comes with a battery pack, so you can attach it to your clothes for surveillance on the move. Not that we'd suggest stalking as a pastime but, you know, just in case. Surely though, there should be a law against this sort of thing? What do you mean there is? Well, if you must snoop then do so with caution, which is exactly what the MicroCam was made for. ✪✪✪✪✪

C-PEN® 600C

✪ £139 • Mega Pixels • 0800 028 2261 • **www.cpen.com**

Students rejoice. At last someone has realised how tiresome all that plagiarism is. What with having to actually read the text and then type it all into to your PC, it's a wonder you ever find the time for a well-deserved alcoholic beverage or two. It's a busy and stressful time.

But all that is about to change thanks to one of the greatest Swedish exports since Ikea. The C-Pen® is an ingenious device that scans text and then transfers it to your PC. All you do is move the pen over any printed text, between 5 and 22 point, and its built-in camera snaps and saves the words in its memory as a document.

With a storage capacity of 6MB, it can store up to 1,500 pages of text and 150 addresses. There's also a C-Dictionary function so if you come across one of those irritating intellectual words that those heavy text books like to scare us with, simply scan the word and the meaning will appear on its display. And it even translates text into a wide range of European languages, perfect for wooing that Spanish beauty you keep spotting in the library.

Navigating your way around the pen's intuitive menu is simple with its jog dial and it is equally easy transferring data to your PC whether via infra-red or the COM cable provided. All in all, the C-Pen® is an ingenious addition to any cheat's pencil case. ✪✪✪✪✪

DVD REVIEWS

THE GODFATHER TRILOGY

✪ £47.99 • Certificate 18 • Paramount

Here's a quick tip for this Christmas. If one of your relatives asks you what you want, tell them you wouldn't mind a DVD. While they're basking in the glow of getting off cheaply, quietly inform them that the one you want is *The Godfather* Trilogy box-set and wait for the colour to drain from their faces.

One and two are acknowledged classics for just about everyone (with Al Pacino in the best form of his life) but watching all the films back to back lets you see that the third isn't as bad as a lot of people try to make out. It might be the weakest of the three, but it's still a worthy conclusion to the series. Add the huge amount of extras to the equation (the box contains five DVDs, including just about everything you wanted to know about the trilogy – see Extra Features below) and despite the fact that you'll have seen the films several times over, it's a must-buy. Or, with any luck, a must-blag.

EXTRA FEATURES More than three hours, including commentary by Francis Ford Coppola, a documentary on the making of the films, additional scenes, cast rehearsals, locations featurette, storyboards, music, Corleone family tree, and *The Godfather* historical timeline. ✪✪✪✪✪

DVD OF THE MONTH
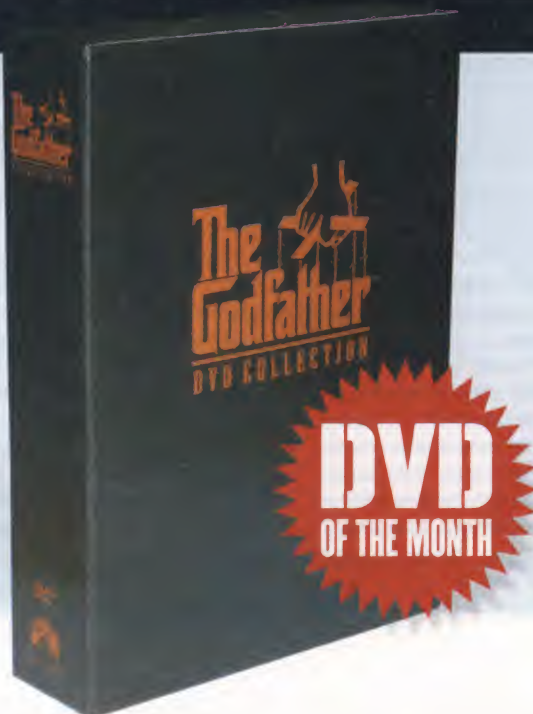
AMORES PERROS

✪ £18.99 • Certificate 18 • Optimum Releasing

Although this film got a small theatrical release, it didn't get the recognition it deserves and most people still haven't got a clue what you're on about if you ask them if they've seen it. To do justice in a review this size would be impossible, and while some quarters have compared it to Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*, *Amores Perros* (Love's a Bitch) goes much deeper, while using a similar technique of interweaving different stories and switching the narrative from the past, back to the present, and back again. Pacing is superb, and although pretty bleak with some disturbing images of dog fights, this is a film that must be seen by anyone with more than a passing interest in cinema.

EXTRA FEATURES Additional scenes • Behind the scenes • Three music videos • Theatrical trailer. ✪✪✪✪✪

AIRGO POGO STICK

£79.95 • www.firebox.com

Is there no end to this retro madness? Last year we careered around on kiddy scooters and now this. The humble, and quite frankly useless, pogo stick is back… and this time it's pumped.

Grab it between your less-than-steady thighs and you'll be whisked back to an innocent time of Dunlop Green Flash and no-tongue-snogging. But it's when you start to jump about that you realise technology has come along in, well, leaps and bounds since those early years. With the minimum of effort you'll be leaping over small children and perhaps large animals, because they've replaced that crappy old spring with a pneumatic piston cylinder, which is filled with air via a built-in pump system.

It's also adjustable to the individual weight, so whether you're a huge heifer (like Korda) or a skinny little runt (like Woods) you'll still be leaping for the skies. The current record stands at five foot, but after our pathetic efforts, we really don't recommend you try this at home.

It's also very lightweight and neatly folds up to a highly portable 52cm x 10cm, so you take the Airgo fun with you where ever you go. Which poses only one question: Why?

RICOH CAPLIO

£449.99 • Johnsons Photopia • 01782 753300 • www.ricohpmmc.com

Ricoh cameras have something that makes them stand out from the digital crowd. Whether it's the unique styling or all the extras, they definitely have the 'oooh' factor. This new addition to the family is no exception.

The Caplio RR10 first grabs your attention with its sleek design and off-centre lens. And it's small enough to slide in your pocket. Under normal circumstances those ten-in-one gadgets just don't cut the mustard, but as we've said, Ricoh don't make ordinary cameras.

The Caplio offers 2.1 megapixels, with 2x digital zoom. And with its USB docking base, you can transfer images to your PC at the click of a button. The Ricoh base also acts as a battery charger, and if you flip the camera sideways, you've got a web cam. Clever eh? It's also an MP3 player, and you can make 30 second movie clips with it. And with all these extras, chances are you're going to need some extra memory, which is where the optional 64 megabyte SD card comes in handy.

But all this dazzling technology does have its drawbacks, and of all the cameras we've had the pleasure to play with, the Caplio has to be the least intuitive. We're ashamed to admit that we were actually driven to read the manual. A sad day in the Zone office. So yes, it's a multi-functioning extravaganza of a camera, but it can be an awkward little bastard.

IIYAMA VISION MASTER PRO 413

£218 • iiyama • 01438 745 482 • www.iiyama.co.uk

Don't believe the hype, size is everything and unless you're living on bread and water this Christmas, a 17-inch screen is the minimum you should accept. The current Zone Best Budget recommendation is the superb Hansol 710P, but the new iiyama is a superb contender if you've got the extra cash.

Stats-wise, the two are pretty similar, with refresh rates of 85Hz at 1024x768 and 75Hz at 1600x1200, a dot pitch of 0.25mm and a 16-inch viewable screen. The important difference is that the Vision Master comes with Diamondtron technology, and while we could bore you with intricacies we'd prefer to just say that this means you get a brighter picture. Which is good. Overall picture quality is slightly superior as well, with a tight focus all the way to the corners.

The only other difference, aside from the price, is that iiyama has ditched the standard off-white casing and replaced it with an ultra-bright white. It looks decidedly weird at first, and some might even say off-putting, and while your eyes quickly adjust it does make the rest of your equipment look like it's been sitting in a smoky pub for the last couple of years.

BUY ONLINE FROM www.amazon.co.uk — amazon.co.uk

STAR WARS: EPISODE I – THE PHANTOM MENACE
Amazon price £19.99 • Fox Video • Cert PG
Let's not talk about the movie, which is average. Instead, let's concentrate on the special features, which are all excellent. Normally avoided by all but the most ardent fans, even the audio commentary is revealing. But it's the deleted scenes and story telling the making of the movie that are the real stars of the show, offering not only a glimpse of what might have been, but justifiable reasons why the film ended up the way it did. Almost makes it worth watching the film a couple more times. Incidentally, featured in the one of the documentaries is ex-PC ZONE Editor John Davison. Bastard.
EXTRA FEATURES Audio commentary • Deleted scenes • 'The Beginning' documentary • Multi-angled storyboard • Featurettes • 12-part Web documentaries • Music video • Trailers • Image galleries • 'The Making Of Star Wars: Starfighter'.

EVIL DEAD 2: DEAD BY DAWN
Amazon price £14.99 • Momentum Pictures • Cert 18
Purists may scoff that Evil Dead 2 is just a comedy remake of the original film, but that is exactly what makes it such a good film. And yet, despite the over-the-top gore, punchy one-liners and clichéd plot, it still remains unnerving, partly due to the fact that rather than just being evil, the undead here are relentlessly funny – like The Muppet Show for adults. Obvious to all that hero Ash wins the day, Evil Dead 2 is one of the few horror movies when you'll be cheering on both sides. Shame then, that the third film, Army Of Darkness, really was a farce, not to mention the travesty that was Evil Dead 4 (the game).
EXTRA FEATURES Audio commentary • 'Making Of' documentary • Trailer.

BLACKADDER GOES FORTH
Amazon price £15.99 • BBC • Cert 15
You can tell a lot about a person by which of the four Blackadder series they prefer. The fourth batch of episodes is perhaps technically and poignantly the best and ends what is without any doubt the best comedy series to come out of Britain since Monty Python. This time our eponymous scheming anti-hero is demoted to a mere Army captain, as far from the corridors of power of previous series as you could imagine. The trenches of the Western Front are of course the backdrop, and aside from splitting the odd side, few will fail to be moved during the series' final scenes.
EXTRA FEATURES None.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Are you looking to upgrade your PC? Since we've started this Buyer's Guide, prices have dropped consistently every month, and if you're looking for a bit of extra zip, you can get it for a lot less than you might have thought. Memory is dirt cheap as well – if you're still labouring with less than 128Mb RAM buy some now

MOTHERBOARD

BEST BUY — NEW ENTRY

ASUS A7V266-E
STREET PRICE £147 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Asus
TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.asus.com

After the rather lacklustre performance of VIA's first DDR chipset, the KT266, we are now seeing boards trickle through featuring the much improved KT266A. The Asus A7V266-Ewill take PC2100 DDR memory running on the ultra-fast 266MHz bus and all-in-all should represent a hefty performance hike over the previous Best Buy based on the older KT133A chipset. A fast hard drive controller, six USB slots, optional 6-channel audio on board and full support for Athlon XP processors rounds up an excellent package from a reliable motherboard manufacturer.

BEST BUDGET

GIGABYTE GA-7ZXR REV 3
STREET PRICE £92 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE 01908 362700
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

The GA-7ZXR is similar to the ABIT KT-7A-RAID, taking Socket A Athlon processors to 1.4GHz and offering support for up to 4 ATA-100 RAID and 4 ATA-100 IDE devices. It even has four-channel audio on board courtesy of the Creative Labs CT5880 PCI chipset.

PROCESSOR

BEST BUY — NEW ENTRY
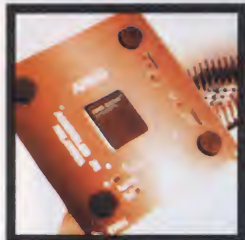
AMD ATHLON XP 1700+
STREET PRICE £175 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803 100 WEBSITE www.amd.com

The Athlon XP processors are named after the clock speed of Intel processors it claims to beat. The 1700+ actually runs at a clock speed of 1.47GHz, and with new so-called QuantiSpeed architecture, more on-chip cache and souped-up 3DNow! instruction set, it offers superb performance in a range of applications – not least games. While the 1800+ is currently the fastest processor in the range, the 1700+ is good value for money. Ensure your Socket A motherboard has an updated BIOS and correctly rated components to run an XP processor before you fork out.

BEST BUDGET

AMD 1.4GHZ ATHLON
STREET PRICE £69
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com

ONLY £69

You can now buy this for £69, from Dabs.com in the UK. It's a screamer, and unbelievably cheap for the performance it offers. As Athlons over 1GHz are only available only in Socket A configuration, make sure you've got the right motherboard. And you'll need a hefty, well-fitted fan to keep the beast cool.

HARD DRIVE

BEST BUY

SEAGATE BARRACUDA ATA IV 60GB
STREET PRICE £133 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366 WEBSITE www.seagate.com

ONLY £133

We have a new Best Buy hard drive – the 60Gb Seagate Barracuda ATA IV. The IBM Deskstar 75GXP drives are looking a bit long in the tooth alongside this modern beastie. Although it's a 7,200 RPM drive, it runs both cooler and quieter than its peers. Fully loaded with a 2Mb cache, the performance is solid across the board, both in terms of average seek times and sustained data throughput. We recommend the 60Gb drive on the basis that it seems pretty good value for money, though the range also offers 20, 40 and 80Gb variants.
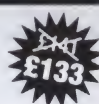
BEST BUDGET

SEAGATE U SERIES 5 20Gb
STREET PRICE £66 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

It's tough these days finding a drive that doesn't offer an ATA-100 interface. Seagate's fabulous ATA-100 U Series 5 drives redefine budget performance, featuring 5,400 RPM platters with a sub-9ms seek time. The 20Gb drive is a good compromise between price and capacity.

MONITOR

BEST BUY

IIYAMA VISION MASTER PRO 510 22in
STREET PRICE £628
MANUFACTURER iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482 WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

I've been a devotee of iiyama products for years – both my monitors at home are iiyamas, both are comparatively old, yet as good as new. The Vision Master Pro 510 has a stunning 22in screen. The tube is a Mitsubishi Diamondtron NF (Natural Flat), arguably the best-performing flat-screen CRT for the money currently available. Of all the large-screen monitors we've come across, it's the best all-rounder, with a tight focus right to the screen corners and fabulous colour purity. It also features iiyama's own Anti-Glare coating, and a maximum resolution of 2048 x 1536.

BEST BUDGET

HANSOL 710P 17in
STREET PRICE £160 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hansol
TELEPHONE 01252 360400
WEBSITE www.hansol-uk.com

For the budget-conscious gamer in need of a monitor, Hansol is a company well worth a look. With a fabulously low price, it will handle 1024 x 768 with a vertical refresh rate of 85Hz, and 1600 x 1200 at a creditable 75Hz. There's not a lot that'll touch this for the money.

GRAPHICS CARD

BEST BUDGET

VIDEOLOGIC VIVID!XS 32MB
STREET PRICE £92 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER VideoLogic
TELEPHONE 01923 277488
WEBSITE www.videologic.com

The new Kyro II chipset blows its slower Kyro brethren to smithereens at 175MHz clock speed as opposed to 115MHz. The 32Mb Vivid!XS replaces the Hercules 3D Prophet 4500 as Best Budget Buy – but only just, there's barely anything to choose between the two.

BEST BUY

ELSA GLADIAC 920
STREET PRICE £286 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Elsa
TELEPHONE 0800 056 3445   WEBSITE www.elsa.de/international/uk/index.htm

The card that's been Best Buy for the last four months is now available to buy, and with the new NVIDIA drivers, it kicks ass. The 32-bit colour performance is cool, the FSAA is blinding, and it's got all the nifty DX8 features you could want. We love it, and its price has dropped again from the ridiculously high RRP. It's the first card to support the sexier features of DirectX 8.0. Elsa's Gladiac features an S-Video socket for output to TV – a hell of a lot more useful than you'd think and comes with a full, specially enhanced version of *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*.

SOUNDCARD

BEST BUDGET

HERCULES GAMESURROUND FORTISSIMO II
STREET PRICE £36 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hercules
PHONE (020) 8686 5600
WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

This four-channel audio card represents excellent value for money and its DirectSound 3D support is gib-tastic. You can even get four channels of surround sound from your DVD movies with a special version of PowerDVD!

BEST BUY   NEW ENTRY

CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY PLAYER
STREET PRICE £82 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A   WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The SonicFury gets pipped to the post by the excellent new Audigy Player from Creative Labs. Successor to the very successful Sound Blaster Live! series, the Audigy has an audio engine four times as powerful, excellent audio quality, and a range of features that makes it the most versatile all-round gaming/music/dvd sound card. EAX Advanced HD adds a range of new 3D audio features, though it'll be a while before games filter through with support for the more esoteric options. It's about £20 more expensive than its main competition, but well worth it.
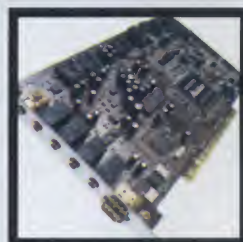
HEADPHONES

BEST BUDGET

MICROSOFT GAMEVOICE USB
STREET PRICE £49.99 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder/

So how can a set of budget headphones cost more than our current Best Buy? It's simple really – the GameVoice enables you to talk to your mates over the Internet. It works very well, and as they double as a more than decent set of headphones, they're a bit of a bargain.

BEST BUY

SENNHEISER HD 200 MASTER
STREET PRICE £45
MANUFACTURER Sennheiser
TELEPHONE 01494 551 551   WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk

This German audio company has been around for more than 50 years, founded by the suitably Teutonic-sounding Dr Fritz Sennheiser. The HD200s are actually targeted at DJs, and for good reason. They're very, very loud. They're very, very strong. They have a closed back design, meaning you can hear nearby rocket jumpers comfortably while her indoors has *EastEnders* turned up high enough so she can hear it from the kitchen. And, crucially for extended gaming sessions, they're comfortable and light, weighing around 140g. A great pair of cans at a top price.

CDRW DRIVES

BEST BUDGET
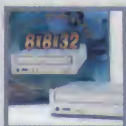
TEAC CDW58EK 8X8X32
STREET PRICE £72 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Teac
TELEPHONE 01923 225235
WEBSITE www.teac.co.uk

I've just had to buy a load of CD/RW drives and these Teac drives were dead cheap, easy to install and have worked without a hitch. Bearing in mind my first CD-RW drive cost me well over £250 and was flaky and slow, these babies are a good deal. Shop around and you're laughing…

BEST BUY

PLEXTOR 16/10/40A
STREET PRICE £115 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Plextor
TELEPHONE +32 2 725 5522   WEBSITE www.plextor.com

£187 £115

We've been running Plextor CDs, DVDs and CD-Rs for years in our machines and they're a) bulletproof and b) fast as anything you'll get within a few quid of the asking price. This is a brand new drive that is dead fast, offers Sanyo Burnproof technology and is competitively priced alongside some good contenders from Yamaha and Mirai. It comes with WinOnCD (nowhere near as good as Nero but proven) and offers CD-R, CD-RW and fast CD-Read performance. I'd upgrade, but my ancient SCSI 6x Plextor CD-R still cuts the mustard – three years on…
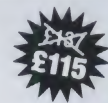
JOYSTICKS

BEST BUDGET

SAITEK CYBORG 3D GOLD
STREET PRICE £45
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk

Saitek's current generation of sticks are fabulous. The Cyborg Gold is a top-line USB stick that excels across the board. The design is superb, both strong and adjustable – even lefties are catered for – and its response and accuracy are unequalled, even among more pricey competition.

BEST BUY

MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER FORCEFEEDBACK 2
STREET PRICE £62 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/products/hardware/sidewinder/sidewinder.htm

Force-feedback products aren't everyone's cup of tea, but nothing comes close to the SideWinder FF2. It's a huge, heavy tabletop affair, with the power transformer built into the base. An infrared sensor causes the stick to leap to attention when you grasp it. The force-feedback routines work extremely well – mainly because the motors are so powerful. If more games made better use of the technology, it would be a must-have piece of gear.

The stuff of dreams

⊕ ENDZONE EDITOR Rhianna Pratchett

There's a good reason I don't play many first-person shooters (bar a spat of *Unreal Tournament*), well there's two actually. One, I'm not that good at them, and two, because I dream computer games.

I expect all of us have experienced two in its less extreme form at some point – like when you've just had a lengthy game of *Counter-Strike* and you actually find yourself strafing round corners. Or you engage in a bit too much *Hitman Codename 47* (a classic game that rears its bald head in both the Cheatmaster and Dear Rhianna sections this month) and you find yourself glancing warily up onto rooftops trying to spot the hidden guards.

It's a credit to such games that they can actually bleed into our waking life like that, but when they start edging into our dreams then you've got to start thinking about what you're playing. I had to stop playing *Tomb Raider* after the T-Rex bit, because after two weeks of being pursued through my subconscious by an extinct reptile, I dreaded what might follow.

A game that I can never play for very long, lest I spend too many sleepless nights crawling around like GI Jane, is the fantastic *Operation Flashpoint,* and this issue we bring you the best new single- and multiplayer missions in Extended Play on page 166. Retro Zone and Talking Heads have taken a well-earned rest this month but they will be back with a vengeance next month.

YOUR HOSTS

Adam Phillips

Phil Wand

CHEATMASTER

You didn't hear it from us

★ A BAD INFLUENCE Rhianna Pratchett

NEED HELP?

If your problems persist, all you need to do to solve them is…

WRITE TO Dear Rhianna/Cheat Master, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1P 5FF

EMAIL letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk with **Dear Rhianna** or **Cheat Master** in the subject line

COMMANDOS 2: MEN OF COURAGE
Eidos

To access these cheats either type your player name in as GONZOANDJON or select any of your commandos and type in GONZOANDJON.

Ctrl + I	Makes you invincible
Ctrl + V	Makes you invisible
Ctrl + X	Teleports you
Ctrl + Shift + N	Skips the mission
Ctrl + Shift + X	Kills all your enemies

CONQUEST: FRONTIER WARS
Ubi Soft

While you're playing, hit Enter and type in 'Give the sushi to Sean' to activate the cheats. Then press Enter and type:

spacebridge	Unlocks missions
A winner is you!	Win current mission
I am evil Homer	Lose mission
The Master Builders	Fast-build mode
The Ultimate Doom	Destroys player
If they could see me now	Removes the fog of war

I can see clearly now	Removes fog of discovery
I'll rip out your optics	Normal fog of war
Your chicks for free	Disables building costs
Some Great Reward	Maximum resources
Can you smell something?	Gives you gas
I want a raise	Gives you ore
The courage of the fearless crew	Gives you crew members

RED FACTION
THQ

Hit the '~' key while in the game to bring up the console window, then type:

Bighugmug	Gives you all weapons and ammo
Heehoo	Fly mode
Vivalahelvig	God mode
Camera1/2/3	Changes camera

F1 MANAGER
EA Sports

Type these in as your Manager name to access these cheats:

Get Rich Quick	Increases your money when you click on the money display in the menu
Doctor~Who	Skips forward seven days when you click on the date in the menu
Win~at~all~COSTS	Enables cheat mode button in the options menu
Billy No Race	Skips races and allows you to increase money (as in Get Rich Quick)

HITMAN: CODENAME 47
Eidos

To bring up a console screen within a game add the line 'enableconsole 1' to your Hitman.ini file which you'll find in your Hitman directory. When in a game press the '~' key to bring up the console window and then try any one of the following codes:

Infammo	Gives you unlimited ammo
Giveall	Maximum ammo weapons
God 1	God mode
Invisible 1	Invisibility mode

Access all missions
Type 'Kim Bo Kastekniv' as your profile name.

Multiple Gun Combo Trick
For this neat little trick you need to have the Beretta 92 in your inventory and it will allow you to gain up to 15 rounds in any gun.

1 Select the gun you want to gain the rounds in, and make sure that is the *only* thing you are holding.
2 Drop the gun on the floor. Don't worry, you'll get it back.
3 Equip yourself with the Beretta 92 and then pick up the gun you have just dropped.
4 You'll now find yourself holding both

STUPID COMPETITION

Where cheating and pointlessness are qualities to be admired

So you fancy yourself as a bit of a cheat master do you? Well, here's your chance to prove it by entering our Stupid Compo. All you have to do to enter is send us your most pointless cheats. If we think your cheat is stupid enough, we'll not only print it and your name, we'll also send you the most ridiculous prize we can find in the *PC ZONE* prize cupboard.

Please send your cheats, with the title Stupid Compo, a brief description of what they (allegedly) do, along with your name

and address, to letters@pczone.co.uk. Make sure you include all your correct details, so if you win we know where to send your special prize. This month's winner is Tim Buss from Kent with his cheat for *Age Of Empires II*. Press Enter and type 'I love the monkey head'. It's so worth it, because as Tim says: "This will give you a weird little naked guy that runs about the screen and can't harm anything!" We hope you feel like chicken tonight Tim, because you've won a copy of *Revenge Of Marjorie The Chicken*.

REVENGE OF MARJORIE THE CHICKEN

guns at the same time and they will both have 15 rounds in.

KOHAN: IMMORTAL SOVEREIGNS
Strategy First

Press Enter then type one of the following codes.

hoody hoo	Plus 10 to all production
speed it up	Fast-build mode
unpleasant dreams	Cataclysm
free gold	Maximum gold
Yeahbam	Win mission
Show fog	Reveal the entire map
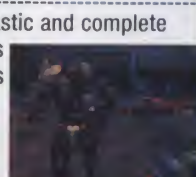
PARIS - DAKAR RALLY
Acclaim

To gain access to all cars enter your name as ILUMBERJACK

HOGS OF WAR
Infogrames

Type in the following as your team name:

WATTA PORK	Bonus FMV
MARDY PIGS	Level select
PRYING PIGS	View FMV sequence
NAUGHTY PIGS	Promote pigs and select level

TOMBRAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION
Eidos
Unlimited items

Face Lara exactly north (check your compass is transparent). Enter the inventory screen. Cycle to the small medipak, hold down the G + U + N + S keys and then release.

All weapons

Face Lara exactly north. Use the

'Unlimited items' code above then close the inventory screen. Enter the inventory screen again and cycle to the large medipak, hold down the W + E + A + P + O + N + S keys and then release.

Level skip

Have Lara face exactly north. Go to 'Load Game' and hold down the H + E + L + P keys and then release.

DEAR RHIANNA

Rhianna Pratchett has the knowledge

BURNING UP

Q Please help! I'm playing *Black & White* and I seem to be stuck on land five. The fireballs keep burning everything up so I can't do much to stop them. My whole village gets torn up in seconds!

funkstar33

A It sounds like you're probably using an unpatched version of the game, which contained a serious bug in land five that made it impossible to complete the mission. You can get a patch to rectify this at www.bwgame.com. If you're running the patched version and the fireballs are coming from Nemesis' lion creature, then try using water miracles or better still try and use your creature to occupy him

RED-FACED

Q I read the review of *Sheep, Dog 'N' Wolf* and I was amused to see that the reviewer got stuck on a big red boss – well amused until I encountered that big red thing myself. It is in fact the most horrible boss I've seen in my hardcore gamer life. I haven't even achieved the first of the three tasks so here is my question: how do I get rid of that thing?

Vincent Bloser

A James fully admits that this is a very tough baddie, even if you do know what to do. The idea is to run

round and round the monster to try and make him dizzy. When he gets dizzy (and therefore doesn't try to attack you) try jumping on the cog on the wall to turn on the light. Do this a few times and the light will eventually push him over the edge of the pit.

RIGHT AND HONG

Q Please help, I am currently banging my head off on hard surfaces trying to complete the Lee Hong Assassination Level of *Hitman Codename 47*. Please – before I actually do any damage – can you supply me with any cheats, or even tell me how to

skip this level. Failing that can you recommend a good Casualty department in Kent!

Mike

A Even better than that, I'll tell you how to complete it! This is a pretty tough mission and your best friends will be a good set of armour and a few nifty disguises. First talk to the barman and get the flyer and the clues about the captured CIA agent. Then rescue Ling from the brothel and get the safe combination. Use a guard's disguise to get through the kitchen and down into the basement where you'll find the

guarded CIA agent. Locate the safe and trade the jade figurine you find in there with the herbalist for some poison. Use a waiter's outfit and lace Hong's soup with the poison. When all hell breaks loose, get out to a back alley quick and get yourself a gang member's disguise. Then get back into the building and down into the basement where you should find the lift to Hong's apartment. Now get the hell up there and take him out!

DISMISSED!

Q After completing the mission Taking Command in *Operation Flashpoint*, I am sent to Colonel Blake who tells me I "underperform" and I am forced to retry the mission. Is there any way that I can get round this?

Die-Harder

A Quite a few people have had problems with the Taking Command mission. The key to success is not so much about how well you do in this particular mission, but about how well you've done in the ones leading up to it. Even if you got promoted in the last one, have a go at replaying the last few missions before that one and try to get a really good score. Do that, and you should find you breeze through Taking Command.

Black & White
beautiful but buggy.

WATCHDOG

Feeling let down by customer services? Stuck with a defective PC? If you're at the end of your tether, allow *PC ZONE* to part the clouds and let the sunshine in

⊗ **MAKING THINGS RIGHT** Adam Phillips

SCAN DOWN THE PAN?

Q I have a problem I hope you can help with involving Scan. I ordered a PC and a keyboard and mouse, a 5m UTP CAT-5 Cable Cross Over, 10/100 Mbit PCI RJ45 NIC PnP and a Scan V90 PCI modem on May 30. I returned home the next day from work to discover the courier had left a yellow card stating they had tried to deliver in the afternoon. I arranged a new delivery time and returned home the next night to discover I had been 'carded' again.

I called again and we agreed to have the items delivered on the Thursday as my girlfriend would wait in for them. No-one arrived. I didn't call as I assumed they would just deliver the next day and again my girlfriend waited in. Still nothing. On Monday, I phoned and they apologised, saying that I had been carded many times.

I explained I had been carded only twice and that no one turned up at all on the Thursday. They agreed a new delivery date and again my girlfriend waited in. no one arrived all day. I called again the next night and they then said that Scan had requested the items back due to non-delivery. After a few minutes, I agreed to just send them back and I would claim a refund.

Since then I have tried to contact Scan's Technical and Customer Service lines on more than 30 occasions but haven't been able to get through. The line is either engaged, rings out,

SCAN-DALOUS!

Call that service? You need a slap...

Q The following complaint has been cut down due to space restrictions:

I ordered a Fujitsu 27.3GB ATA 66 HD, a Coolmaster Cool drive and an internal case fan from Scan on August 4 2000. (There were problems getting my goods delivered but that's another story.)

Now jump forward a year to August 2001. The disk started making loud reading noises and would occasional crash the PC. I left disk-checking software running all day to check the integrity of the disk. It reported in the end that there was platter damage. I phoned Scan.

After wasting a ridiculous amount of time being put in queues, I rang again and chose the Sales option. I got through to an operator straight away. I told him the story and he said that he would get someone from Customer Care to ring me back with a RMA number.

Next day after no call, I phoned Scan. I tried the Customer Care option again and after listening to a phone ring for half an hour, I phoned Sales. The operator who answered said I should go through the Customer Care options, so I told him of the problems I had getting through to a Customer Care operator.

He then looked at my problem and said that I purchased the disk on August 4 2000, and as it was August 8 2001, my warranty had run out. I told him the story of the cock-up in the delivery and said

⊙ Scan is harping on about its new Customer Care expansion plan. If it all pans out, we should never receive complaints like Mr Proctor's ever again.

that my warranty should run from when I got the drive. He said he would get someone from Customer Care to phone me back to sort it out. No phone call.

Next day I phoned again and tried the Customer Care option. I waited listening to music for a whole hour and no operator. Redialled and chose Sales. This operator did give me a returns number – RMA 33996. So I sent the disk by DHL that day. I sent an email to Scan saying it was on the way and gave them the DHL tracking number.

A week later, no contact from Scan. Again I tried the Customer Care option. I waited listening to music for a whole hour and no operator. Redialled and chose Sales. I told the operator that I would like to find out what was happening with my drive as I had no home PC to do my remote work on for my employer. He said he couldn't help and I would have to speak to Customer Care as their new system wouldn't allow them to transfer internally to Customer Care.

I told him about the problem of getting through to them on the phone, so he said to send an email to them and to check my RMA on the website for an up-to-date notification of what was happening. So I sent an email and checked the website. It said: item received and awaiting testing.

Last Tuesday I managed to get the email of the Customer Care Manager. I sent an email saying I wanted a call back that day or I was going to get third parties involved (i.e. Trading Standards and the computer press).

Paul from Scan did call me at 5.45pm that night – I nearly died of shock! He said they had found my disk and it was being tested as we spoke. Someone would ring me back first thing the next day with the results and I would have a new disk by
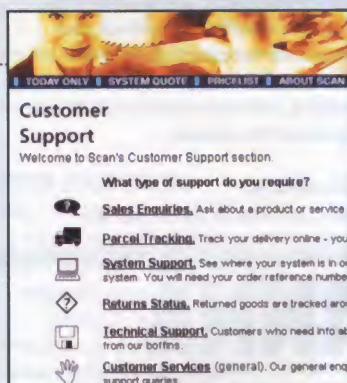
⊙ According to Scan, the main part of its strategy is its 'commitment to quality'.

the end of the week. Well, surprise, surprise, no call the following day. So I emailed again.

This got no reply. By the end of last Thursday I'd had just about enough of Scan. The website had changed. It said: 'The item has been tested and there is no fault – please ring Customer Care for more info.' I tried Customer Care and got an hour of music.

I redialled and chose Sales again. I demanded to know the name of the managing director. The salesperson was scared and asked why I wanted to know his name. When I told him why, he said he would transfer me to Wesley. Hang on, I thought they couldn't transfer internally.

Wesley told me that my disk had been sent to Fujitsu for replacement. Fujitsu had had it for the last seven days and it would take another 7-14 days for Fujitsu to send a replacement to Scan who would then forward it on to me. Hang on again. How can Fujitsu have had my disk for the last seven days, when Paul found it only two days before in their Returns department? Wesley said he'd ring back with a clearer picture in the morning.

He did ring back and said it hadn't been sent to Fujitsu – it had been downstairs all the time. They had tested it three times and had found no fault. If I would pay £20 + VAT, they would return my disk. What? But I had to, so I gave him my card details.

I demanded that he send a letter with the drive confirming it was 100 per cent OK. He agreed. Today, I still haven't received my disk. Their website still says there's no problem and to ring Customer Care. I can't get through to Customer Care.

I spoke to Sales three times. Sent four emails to the managing director (elan@scan.co.uk) with Wesley copied in demanding a call today – and nothing. What do I have to do to get my disk back?
Ean Proctor

A Bloody hell. What a catalogue of utter cock-ups highlighted in exacting detail by your good self, Ean. We sent the full version of this complaint to the bods at Scan for their feedback on what appears to be a fairly catastrophic example of piss-poor customer care. A spokesperson for the company told us: "I personally have dealt with Mr E Proctor. I have dealt with his enquiry and he is now in possession of his items and all charges were waived. I also confirmed in writing to Mr Proctor that the items were indeed found to contain no fault."

OK. So the product was ultimately deemed to be in full working order. But what about the mass of phone calls Ean had to make? The ridiculous delays? The waiting on the phone for hours? The lack of response from anyone at Scan? Can you offer us any food for thought on this? What about a simple apology for any inconvenience caused? No, it would seem. They signed off telling us: "This complaint is now resolved."

leaves me on hold for hours or it is finally picked up only to then go dead. I also sent in complaints via the online form on Scan's website.

I'd appreciate any help you can give as it has become beyond tiresome and I have all but given up hope of receiving any kind of refund from this company. I work in technical support and all of my colleagues order from Scan, or at least we used to until three of us had a similar experience. Which is a shame as it promised to be a good service.

Tim Scyner

A Over to the helpful bods at Scan (or not, as the case may be): "I have looked into Tim's case and found that delivery was attempted on June 4, 5, 6 and June 8 2001,"

NO FREE UPGRADE

Q I bought a PC from PC World about three years ago now. When I bought it, the friendly man went through all the extras we could get if we paid more. Firstly, the obvious one where if anything breaks it gets replaced. Fair enough, we paid that, and then the man told us if we paid more, we could 'upgrade' our PC to a better model in the future. So seeing as the processor is a Cyrix and everyone knows how slow they are now, I called PC World to find out about this upgrade we had been told about. I was told very directly that I was a liar and

> **66** He told us that if we paid more, we could 'upgrade' to a better model in the future **99**
>
> MIKE KENNY, DON'T LISTEN TO THEM SALESPEOPLE

said a spokesperson for the company. They added: "The refund has been passed to our accounts department and been actioned."

Great. But no mention of why there was such confusion about the simple matter of arranging a convenient time to deliver the goods. It can't be that impossible surely. And no mention either as to why no one appears to be manning the phones in their Customer Care department.

⊕ Are people at Scan too busy posing on the website to pick up the phone?

READ ME

that PC World had never offered such a thing.

I was disappointed and wondered whether I had got it wrong so I called Mastercare who provided the offer in the first place. After the normal two-hour wait, I was told I was correct. I called PC World back and they said: "You can have an upgrade if you pay!" Please help me out on this one as I am completely in the dark!

Mike Kenny

A Ho-hum. There ain't no such thing as a free upgrade. If there was, we'd all be first in line to buy into such a bargain. But have PC World been leading you up the garden path? "With reference to our customer Mr Michael Kenny, we have researched the matter and it would appear that Mr Kenny was unfortunately under the impression that by buying the additional warranty, it would entitle him to a free upgrade," offered a spokesperson for the company. "This is not the case. Buying the additional warranty means that if Mr Kenny decided to upgrade the machine at his own expense within the period of the warranty, then any faults that develop as a result of the upgrade, will then be covered by the warranty."

In the meantime, they apologise if there was any confusion, adding: "As a gesture of goodwill, we have arranged for £20 worth of vouchers to be sent to him."

DEAR WANDY

Every month our resident surgeon reads your letters and solves your problems. Think you know better? Write in, sound intelligent, win yourself £50

⬤ ENCHANTER MIGHTY Phil Wand

⬤ The PlexWriter 24/10/40A gets the ZONE thumbs up.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Q I currently have a PII 450 with 128Mb RAM and a GeForce 2 GTS. I am looking to buy a CD-RW drive, and the new Plextor 10x ReWrite, 24x Write, 40x Read IDE BurnProof item caught my eye. I was wondering, what's the difference between OEM, IDE and retail? Any help would be much appreciated.

Guy McGechan

A OEM stands for Original Equipment Manufacturer. The term describes hardware that has been manufactured by one company then re-badged and sold as the product of another. Common OEMs include IBM (who allow much of their hard drive and mass storage technology to bear the branding of other companies) and Mitsubishi, who make some of the finest screens. Their Diamondtron NF tube finds its way into countless different varieties of monitor including our Best Buy Iiyama Vision Master. When spending money, buying OEM as opposed to retail means you get the basic goods but not the packaging – the meat but not the veg. This means the product turns up wrapped in bubble wrap or even loose in a cardboard box, together with a manual, several elastic bands and a sachet of dessicant. OEM products are typically cheaper than their retail counterparts, often by a considerable margin, and represent good value. Be warned though that you'll go without the freebies such as software or sometimes even a necessary power adaptor, so check before you buy. IDE doesn't actually figure in this particular equation, for it refers to the drive's interface. The only other option here is SCSI, and unless you have a SCSI interface inside your PC, stick with IDE. Oh, and the Plextor is an excellent choice.

DIY DESIGNER

Q I recently obtained some Web space at Yahoo Geocities. Finding the Yahoo PageBuilder software to be totally inadequate, I went on a search for the only other free webpage software I know of: Microsoft FrontPage Express. After a long search around Microsoft's website, I turned up nothing, and have come to the conclusion that they've removed it. Is this true, and if so, what can I use to create my page?

nsa123

A I'm not quite sure what Microsoft have done with FrontPage Express, now conspicuously absent from the install of Internet Explorer 6.0. What I can tell you is that it used to be bundled up with Internet Explorer 4 and 5 in the form of a separate file. If you can, try and have a hunt around for old cover discs that included the full installation of Internet Explorer – then look inside the install folder for a file called Fpesetup.cab – a .CAB file is a compressed archive much like a ZIP file – and that's what you need to open. A copy of WinZip 8.0 will let you get inside any .CAB, and the Fpesetup.cab archive contains all the FrontPage Express files you need. Extract them to a directory, double-click on fpxsetup.exe, and you're done. Alternatives include 1st Page 2000 from www.evrsoft.com, which is highly recommended and doesn't cost a penny, so try 1st Page if you don't have any luck finding FrontPage.

HAVE NARROW, WANT BROAD

Q I have a 750MHz PIII, 3Dfx Voodoo3 2000, 128MB RAM, a DVD Drive, and a 32x CD-RW. Do I need to upgrade? If so, what should I do first, and what should I replace it with? All the games I have played run fine, but the games industry and game requirements want more and more, and it take ages to save up enough dosh. Net-wise I have the old 56Kbps modem, so it doesn't allow me to play any games without bumping into Mr Lag. I'm happy to pay for ADSL but it isn't in my area. What else will give me fast access?

Harry Biddle

A For the moment, I wouldn't make any changes to your set-up. You say that all the games you have run perfectly well, which means unless you have a burning desire to spend cash or brag to your mates there's no reason to upgrade. With regard to your final question, unless you're in an ADSL area – you can check online with a quick visit to www.btopenworld.com – or are within reach of a cable company such as NTL or Telewest, you're left with ISDN as the only other way of upping your bandwidth and reducing lag. Sign up with a Surftime-friendly ISP and it won't be half as expensive as you might think. You might want to ask about RADSL, which allows you to get into broadband even if you're outside the normal range of ADSL. Have a look at secure.jolt.co.uk for details.

DELTA FARCE

Q I am currently running a P600 Celeron with 256Mb, Voodoo3, plus loads of hard drive space. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this machine – until it runs *Delta Force: Land Warrior*. When you launch the game, it locks up, and I have to reboot. I've been in touch with tech support who advised that I needed the latest 3Dfx drivers. I found these on a *PC ZONE* cover disc and installed them: hey presto, it worked. Once. Now every time I want to play *Delta Force* I have to re-install the drivers and even then it's no guarantee.

Anon

A Updating graphics drivers is a common problem, with most people reporting trouble when they change video cards. In your case, it looks as though something is very awry with the drivers on your machine – it's possible you have some leftovers from a previous installation. The best solution is to right-click on the desktop and choose Properties – this is just another way of opening the Display control panel – and then click on the Settings tab at the end. Now, you don't say what operating system you're running, but I'll assume Windows 98. So click on the Advanced button at the bottom followed by the Adapter tab. From here I'll leave you on your own to work your way through the menus to select and install a VGA graphics adaptor from the list of standard display types. When you've reverted to chunk-o-vision, go to the Add/Remove Programs control panel and remove all software that relates to your Voodoo3 – any driver entries, 3Dfx tools, everything. Reboot and reinstall with the latest drivers from www.driverguide.com.

I SURRENDER

Q I just got issue #107 of your magazine and I couldn't help but notice that one of your readers was having a problem with his CD writing. You replied, saying (correctly) that there are deliberate bad sectors on many game CDs to stop potential pirates. The solution you gave was to get updated firmware for the drive. In my opinion, this is a bit drastic, considering that you can fix it with a piece of software. The program is called CloneCD: it

> **My Seagate hard drive has died on me. I had everything on it, games and so on**
>
> ANTHONY NEARLY LOSES IT ALL

Act responsibly when using CD copy tools, or risk the consequences.

creates an exact replica of the CD, bad sectors and all, so you can copy any games you want. This fantastic program has solved almost all of my back-up problems, and it can be found at www.elby.org.

Anon

A I had a fair number of messages from readers telling me I was a dunderhead and that of course you could make back-ups of copy-protected discs. If you read my response, though, I never said you couldn't copy them. I stopped short of providing a full and frank answer as the question had much wider implications; with $2.6 billion of illegally replicated software doing the rounds in the US alone, being economical with the truth seemed the most prudent option. However, since most respondents were keen to point out that it's perfectly legal to make back-ups, with software licences allowing the purchaser to make a single duplicate, I see no reason why the link shouldn't be passed around. So here it is again: CloneCD from www.elby.org.

SONIC WEDGE

Q I recently upgraded my old machine to a 750MHz Duron with 128Mb SDRAM and a Matsonic VIA motherboard. I have an ageing 3Dfx Voodoo3 powering the graphics. However recently I've been experiencing a lot of system crashes. These occur when I'm playing *Team Fortress Classic* on the Net, when I'm playing *Serious Sam* in single-player – even when I'm creating Word documents or listening to music. It has even crashed in the shutdown process. Could you tell me what you think could be causing the problem? By the way, I have a normal fan and heat sink on the processor and my old system that still had the Voodoo3 also used to crash.

Inferno_str1ke

A Tricky. My first inclination was a soundcard, given that you say it locks up during audio playback. I have a Windows 98 machine here with a Yamaha SW1000XG that exhibits the precise same thing: run Winamp, fiddle with the volume, and it'll

lock tighter than a camel's arse in a sandstorm. What solved it was downloading Yamaha's latest driver set, so you may wish to do that for your soundcard. Later in your message you talked about 'normal' cooling and the fact that the Voodoo3 used to crash in your old machine. First off, AMD chips don't like to get too hot. They kick up an awful fuss if allowed to bake, so make sure you get the temperature down. Second, have you updated your Voodoo3 drivers? Many people still use the drivers that came on their original CD-ROM: fatal mistake. Get the latest from www.driverguide.com.

DO THE TWIST

Q Help! My Seagate hard drive has died on me. I had everything on it – all my games, letters, MP3 files and so on. Normally I leave the computer on, but my power supply failed and when I came to switch the machine back on, the main disk failed to spin up. It doesn't even make a sound, not even a click or a whine. Can you please help?

Anthony

A By "MP3 files and so on" I take it you mean pornography gleaned from many hours surfing the Internet after your mum's gone to bed. So this is indeed an emergency! Fear not, though, for I believe I have the solution. What normally happens in instances where the machine is left on 24/7 is that peripherals with moving components develop an aversion to starting up. A hard drive undergoes maximum stress when you first turn it on, as the motor has to gather speed from rest – keeping the platters at a constant speed is much easier. So what you need to do is lend a helping hand. Grab the disk tightly with both hands and then sharply twist it clockwise with the power connected. Assuming you haven't done something daft, like plugged the cable in upside down, a fiver says it'll magically start to work. Back up everything onto another drive and replace it as soon as you can. ⊠

ON THE CD

This month's CDs will titillate and tease you into a gaming frenzy

🟠 **DISCS** Matt Cheshire **WORDS** Rhianna Pratchett

DEMOS

ALIEN vs PREDATOR 2 MULTIPLAYER

Disc 1 · Vivendi

EXCLUSIVE

Play as four different characters in this multiplayer demo, including the Alien and Predator drones, a marine and a corporate gal, through deathmatch and team deathmatch modes. With a brighter and more open level for up to 16 players, plus the ability to configure the in-game classes, it's maximum carnage. When you've finished, check out our exclusive review and find out why this is the shooter of the year so far.

CONTROLS

Forward/Back	W/S
Strafe left/Strafe right	A/D
Turn left/right	Right arrow or mouse
Run left	Shift
Toggles between walk/run	M
Jump/Climb	Space
Fire left	Mouse
Alternative fire	Right mouse
Activate	E
Look up/down	Home/End or mouse

Predator Bob conducts another round of 'No Woman No Cry'.

BALDUR'S GATE II: THE DARKEST DAY

Disc 1 · Max Schnur and Richard Haines

EXCLUSIVE

The Darkest Day is a massive unofficial expansion for *BGII*. It contains some great features including more than 180 new items, 170 new spells, 75 new kits and a huge amount of questing, lasting a minimum 30 extra hours of gameplay. Be warned this is not *Throne Of Bhaal*-compatible as yet.

CONTROLS

Mouse and keyboard

⬆ Recognise this place?
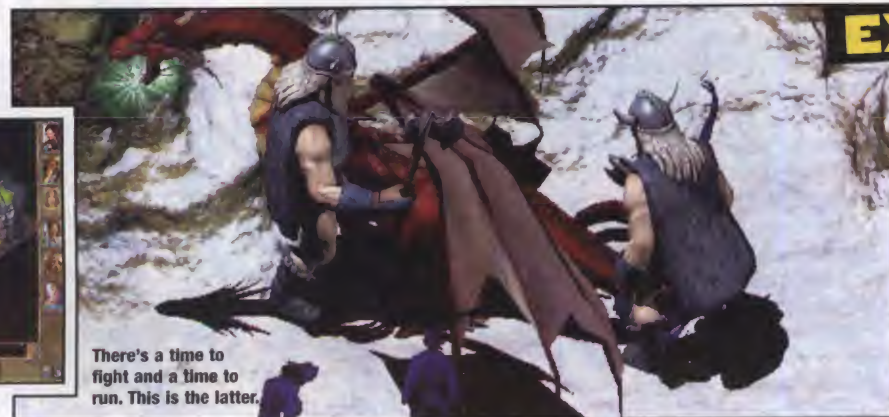
There's a time to fight and a time to run. This is the latter.

STAR WARS GALACTIC BATTLEGROUNDS

Disc 2 · Activision

One of the best *Star Wars* games to grace the PC for a long time, not to mention being a damn fine RTS to boot. This demo gives you a wee taster with the first campaign mission of the Galactic Empire, and allows you to play as the Rebel Alliance or the Galactic Empire in multiplayer mode.

CONTROLS
Mouse
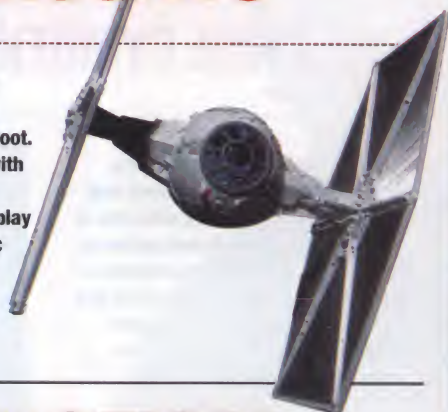
SWAT 3 TACTICAL GAME OF THE YEAR

Disc 2 · Vivendi

NEW DEMO

> Posh places always have carpet on the ceiling.

Get your grubby little mitts on all the weapons and multiplayer features of the full game in this one-mission demo of the superb tactical police sim. Protect the VIPs from terrorist attacks at the famous Chang's Chinese theatre and take in a little deathmatch and co-operative play online.

CONTROLS

Forward	Up arrow	Stand	S	Reload	R
Backward	Down arrow	Left lean	/	Flashlight	F
Right	Right arrow	Right lean	-	Weapons status	Space
Left	Left arrow	No lean	*	Communications	M
Crouch	C	Use/Open	U	View size	-/+

Full 3D beauty.

EMPIRE EARTH

Disc 2 · Vivendi

Undoubtedly one of the most glorious, and ambitious RTS games. Take your first history class with four training scenarios and two campaign scenarios which let you try your hand at commanding British troops during the Napoleonic wars as well as the infamous Red Baron.

CONTROLS
Mouse

TENNIS MASTER SERIES

Disc 1 · Microids

Simply the best tennis game around at the moment, *Tennis Master Series* boasts some of the best AI, physics and genuinely challenging opponents that we've seen for along time. This demo allows you to play against the computer with three players, on one court at two different times.

We've come a long way since *Pong*.

CONTROLS

Up/down/left/right	Arrow keys
Flat	J
Slice	K
Topspin	L
Lob	I
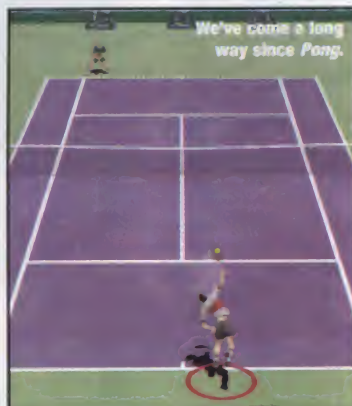
The best-looking rally game is here.

RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP XTREME

Disc 1

The latest offering in the *Rally Championship* series is right up there with *Colin McRae 2* and combines all the extreme fun and realism of its predecessors with great graphics and the ability to indulge in some free-range driving. Get a taster with this one-car, one-track demo. Watch out for an exclusive *PC ZONE* track next issue.

CONTROLS
Configure in game

MODWATCH CD2

Science & Industry 0.97 (HL)
Azure Sheep (HL)
Coliseum2 v2.5 (Q3)

Coliseum2 v2.6 Updater (Q3)
Uspace (UT)
Zen Quantum Fighter Jets (UT)

My first *EverQuest*.

END OF TWILIGHT

Disc 1 · New Media Generation

The Scandinavian gods are fighting amongst themselves and it's your job in this turn-based RPG to get in there and get the best of the spoils while fighting a few battles of your own. This demo contains the first two missions of the game and a bonus mission.

CONTROLS
Mouse

EVIL TWIN: CYPRIEN'S CHRONICLES

Disc 2 · Ubi Soft

PCs have never been synonymous with really good platform games and although *Evil Twin* takes a wild stab at enlivening the genre, it ends up being entertaining, but hardly revolutionary. Take control of Cyprien, who looks like a slightly less antisocial version of Chucky and explore his E number-induced over-active imagination.
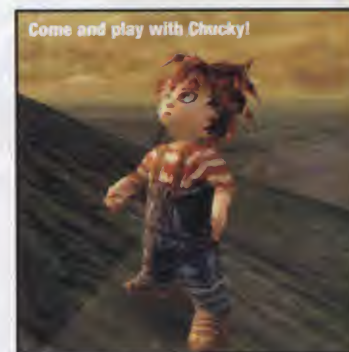
Come and play with Chucky!

CONTROLS
Joystick

THE DUGOUT ZONE CD2

in association with www.thedugout.net

To celebrate the fact that our favourite footie management game is currently riding high in the charts, we've got the third instalment of The Dugout Zone. In it there's a guide to show you how planning can make a manager's life easier, a tutorial showing you how to complete a data update and a quick glance at the Scottish Premier clubs.
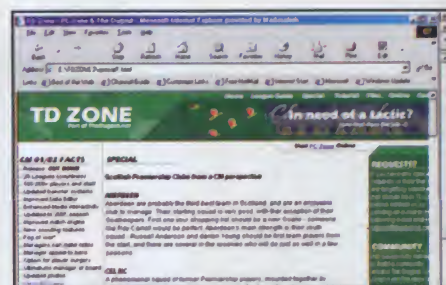
You're won't find much in the way of talent here.

PATCHES CD2

Counter-Strike/Half-Life ATI
Overflow Fix
Quake III Arena Point Release 1.30
FINAL
Max Payne v1.02
Serious Sam v1.04
Diablo II v1.09b
Throne of Darkness v1.1.10
Gangster 2 v1.0.7

Tribes 2 v23669 to v24834
Real v1.2
Diablo II: Lord of Destruction v1.09b
Combat Command: Desert Rats v1.01
Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor
Independence War 2: Edge of Chaos vF14.6

EXTENDED PLAY CD2

Turn to page 166 where Tony Lamb brings you the very best in missions and maps for *Operation Flashpoint* and *Ground Control*.
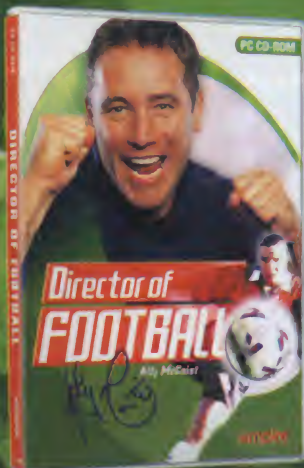
PCZONE TOP 100

Welcome to the definitive buyer's guide for all PC Gamers. The following games are the best 100 games money can buy, split into genres to make your purchases even easier

Have you got money burning a hole in your pocket? If so, make a cheque or postal order payable to *PC ZONE* and we'll forget about writing the mag and get ourselves down the pub for a good drink-up. If you're not feeling altruistic then perhaps you might want to buy yourself a game, but which one? How can you sort the *Unreal Tournament* from the *Daikatana*? Relax, this is where the *PC ZONE* Top 100 comes in handy.

Every game listed here is worth buying. If you're a fan of a certain genre you can head straight for your favourite games, which are ranked in order of brilliance. Some of the games might be a bit long in the tooth but that shouldn't put you off. Most of the old-timers have been re-released on budget and you'll be able to find the rest pretty cheap if you shop around.

The rules are pretty simple. Each month we review a load of games. If any of them are good enough to enter the Top 100 they take their rightful place and the bottom one in that particular genre is consigned to the dustbin never to return again. As games are always improving, we re-evaluate all the titles in a genre every time there is a new entry.

Each month we'll also show you the games that we think are the Top 10 of all time. This month our editor Dave Woods gets the chance to talk about all the games that he plays when he should be

WHEN WE SAY CLASSIC, WE MEAN IT

If a game gets a Classic rating (90 per cent or above) in *PC ZONE* you know it's going to be pretty spectacular. Unlike other organs, we don't shower Classics around like confetti at a royal wedding and you won't find one in every single issue. In fact, of all the games released this year, only four have

been deemed worthy of our gold award, and that includes *Max Payne*, who won't even enter the Top 100 until next month.

Classics have to have something a bit different. They have to take the genre to new heights or impress with originality. For this reason you should also pay special attention

to the games that receive our Award Of Excellence (80-89 per cent). When we say excellent, we mean excellent, and if you're a fan of the genre these games fall into you won't be disappointed. Put your faith in us and we won't let you down, and that's a promise.

Z PCZONE CLASSIC
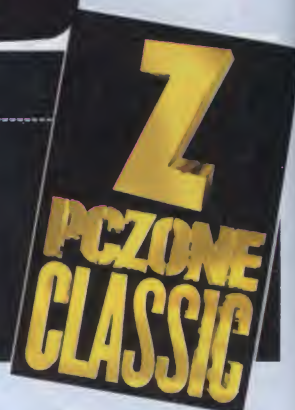
FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS

HALF-LIFE

BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #71 · 95%

○ Taking the first-person shooter as its starting point, *Half-Life* redefines the genre with an engrossing story, cracking atmosphere and some of the best AI ever coded. *Half-Life* is probably still the best game you can install on your PC, and it's now available with the superb *Opposing Force* add-on in the *Generations* pack.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 01189 209100

MAX PAYNE
PCZ #107 · 90%

○ It's not big and it's not clever, but for style and content *Max Payne* receives top marks. The character animations and soon-to-be-copied-by-everyone Bullet-Time mode are the real stars, it's just a shame it only lasts a few hours.
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 722900

UNREAL TOURNAMENT
PCZ #81 · 90%

○ Played over a network or the Internet, *Unreal Tournament* is more than a match for *Quake III*'s multiplayer, with a combination of well-designed maps and diverse gameplay. The single-player mode might be too short, but it's still going to be more than a challenge for most.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 020 7738 8188

QUAKE III ARENA
PCZ #87 · 89%

○ The biggest brand name in PC gaming is back. The sheer speed, intensity and unrelenting action of *Quake III* make it an essential purchase for all shoot 'em up fans, but sadly the lack of variety prevents it from topping *Unreal Tournament*.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING
PCZ #101 · 85%

○ This atmospheric game is one of the most unsettling FPSs we've seen. The graphics and superb sound will have you leaping out of your seat. Here's hoping Barker's contribution will help push the future of narrative and gameplay forward.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

GUNMAN CHRONICLES
PCZ #97 · 84%

○ While comparisons to *Half-Life* are inevitable, *Gunman* contains more than enough nuances to stand out on its own merits. With a superb array of weapons, intense battles and a gripping atmosphere it's a must-have for any fan of the genre.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 01189 209100

PROJECT IGI
PCZ #97 · 84%

○ Combining the action of *Soldier Of Fortune* with the stealth of *Metal Gear Solid*, *Project IGI* is the thinking man's FPS. It features vast, open landscapes, and its clever changes of pace and espionage-oriented storyline will keep you engrossed throughout.
PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000

STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE
PCZ #94 · 84%

○ The first single-player game to use the *Quake III* engine, *Voyager* offers enough thrills to please even the hardest Trekkie haters. A new scripting system and some clever CPU team-mates give renewed credence to solo play in this increasingly multiplayer genre.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143 525

SERIOUS SAM
PCZ #102 · 81%

○ *Serious Sam* is a game that's seriously good fun. You get more monsters than you could ever wish for – they come out of the walls, the floor, pretty much everywhere. A good old-fashioned, arcade-style shooter, with a liberal dose of humour.
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 722900

CODENAME OUTBREAK
PCZ #107 · 80%

○ Rid the world of an invading parasitic alien race in missions that are full of suspense and action – relying on stealth over brute force. However, early missions are dull, and the graphics are somewhat lacking to say the least.
PUBLISHER Virgin Interactive • 020 7551 4266

STRATEGY

COMMANDOS 2

BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #107 · 91%

○ There have been a few *Commandos* imitators but none have come close to this sequel to the original game. If you loved the first game, you're going to love this World War II strategy game even more. One of the most richly detailed games we've ever seen, absolutely massive, and brimming with original ideas.
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • 020 8636 3000

SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR
PCZ #89 · 90%

○ Command huge armies and engage in epic battles, send ninjas to assassinate generals and conquer your way through feudal Japan. The 3D engine works beautifully and the in-game options don't get in the way of the instant playability of the game. *Shogun* will blow you away.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

Z: STEEL SOLDIERS
PCZ #101 · 90%

○ *Z* will re-ignite your passion for strategy games with its fast-paced in-yer-face action that allows you to get down and dirty from the off. The AI is superb, and as it's entirely mouse-driven, it's simple and easy to get into. What more could you ask for?
PUBLISHER EON • 0700 4366344

COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS
PCZ #101 · 89%

○ There are 8,000 troops at your disposal in this historically accurate RTS. Smooth unit movement and a 3D landscape with real physics modelling make it truly absorbing. With great graphics and sound effects to boot it's an essential purchase.
PUBLISHER CDV • 020 8880 4144

AOEII: COLLECTORS' EDITION
PCZ #84 · 88%

○ It might not be radically different from the original, but sometimes evolution is just as good as revolution. In *AOEII*, the gameplay is honed to perfection with balanced units and strong single- and multiplayer campaigns. Forget the hype of *Tiberian Sun* and try this classic RTS.
PUBLISHER Microsoft • 0845 5700 2000

GROUND CONTROL
PCZ #92 · 86%

○ RTSs are increasingly dropping resource management in order to concentrate on strategy. *Ground Control* pulls this off with flair, gorgeous looks and a brilliant camera. If you're after a 3D strategy title but don't fancy samurais, this is the answer.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 01189 209100

SUDDEN STRIKE
PCZ #96 · 85%

○ *Sudden Strike* mixes WWII action with a heavy dose of realism in order to create a compelling RTS. Its clever resource management, huge selection of units and separate campaigns make it a must for RTS fans looking for something a bit different.
PUBLISHER CDV • 020 8880 4144

HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM
PCZ #96 · 85%

○ Relic's mission to improve the already superb 3D RTS *Homeworld* has proved to be a great success. The *Homeworld* universe has been expanded, providing a more elaborate storyline and greater scope for tactical options than its predecessor.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 01189 209100

SW GALACTIC BATTLEGROUNDS
PCZ #109 · 84%
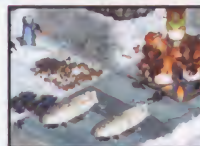
NEWENTRY After *Force Commander* everyone was expecting this to fall on its arse, but with the *AOEII* engine and an editor that lets you recreate your favourite *Star Wars* battles it's really quite good. It might look a bit old but it plays well.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143 525

CONQUEST: FRONTIER WARS
PCZ #109 · 82%
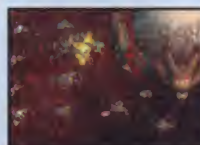
NEWENTRY Shunted by Microsoft into an uncertain future, you have Ubi Soft to thank for this superior strategy title making it to the shops. It's an absorbing game with enough depth to satisfy the hardcore, a multi-level map design and decent AI.
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft • 020 8944 9000

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

DEUS EX
BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #93 · 94%

○ Warren Spector takes the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief* and weaves an RPG of complex beauty that revolutionises computer games. A fascinating sci-fi plot and complete player freedom are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is such a landmark wonder.
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • 020 8636 3000

SYSTEM SHOCK 2
PCZ #80 · 91%

○ Definitely one of the most compelling, original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it in the house on your own with the lights off to prove how hard you are.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE REDEMPTION
PCZ #92 · 89%

○ This amazing RPG is a treat to play. An epic storyline, tactical combat and great acting and music more than make up for the fact that it's a linear hack 'n' slash game at heart.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

THRONE OF DARKNESS
PCZ #109 · 88%

○ An enjoyable party based, strategic hack 'n' slash from the developers of *Diablo*. Take command of seven samurai as they fight their way through feudal Japan on a quest to overthrow the Dark Warlord. Beautiful and bloody.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 9209100
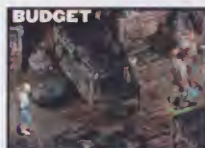
PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
BUDGET
PCZ #87 · 87%

○ An incredible game from Black Isle, creators of *Baldur's Gate*. It's a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG. Moreover, the character development is the best we've seen in any game of its kind and the story is compelling, with well-scripted dialogue.
PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266

BALDUR'S GATE II
PCZ #96 · 85%

○ The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. Although this sequel is not vastly different, it is bigger, better and extremely addictive. *Baldur's Gate II* is a must for all RPG fans.
PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266

ARCANUM
PCZ #106 · 84%

○ Whether you play through as a mage or a techy, you'll still find *Arcanum* hugely entertaining. Don't let its looks fool you – it has a great plot and flexible character development. A massive and addictive game.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 920 9100

ANANCHRONOX
PCZ #105 · 83%

○ The release of *Anachronox* proves *Deus Ex* wasn't a fluke for Ion Storm. OK, it's not as good, but it's an interesting and genuinely funny game in its own right, and we don't get to say that about many games. Well worth a punt.
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • 020 8636 3000

MAGIC & MAYHEM: THE ART OF MAGIC
PCZ #107 · 80%

○ This hugely playable game includes a handy 3D camera, along with the type of gameplay that made the first *M&M* so addictive. A must for fans and RPG newbies.
PUBLISHER Virgin Interactive 020 7551 4266

FINAL FANTASY VII
PCZ #66 · 80%

○ Despite the release of *FFVIII*, we still rate this earlier episode in the series above it. The story is better, there are more sub-games and the whole thing is more involving, especially if you like Japanese-style cartoony graphics. And it's now on budget release.
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • 020 8636 3000

ACTION/ADVENTURE

GRIM FANDANGO
BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #71 · 88%

○ If you've followed the successes of LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must-buy. Sublime graphics and genuine humour ensure it's a classic of its genre. A word of warning: it's bloody hard and, if your mind doesn't work laterally, you'll be playing it until the day you die.
PUBLISHER LucasArts • 020 7368 2255
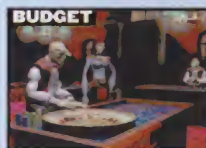
DISCWORLD NOIR
BUDGET
PCZ #79 · 87%

○ Although the point-and-click adventure genre is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and is all the better for it in our opinion, particularly if you're not a fan of Terry Pratchett's zany, off-the-wall humour. Don't miss it.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060

SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS
PCZ #98 · 87%

○ Anyone who doesn't mind being splattered with the kind of gore rarely seen outside of *Soldier Of Fortune* will find much to like in *Severance*. But it stands out from the usual hack 'n' slasher with its amazing engine and console-style combos.
PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132

THE NOMAD SOUL
PCZ #83 · 86%

○ Distinctly odd, but original nonetheless, *The Nomad Soul* is a huge, intricate world populated by lap-dancers and David Bowie. At turns adventure, beat 'em up and platformer, it's insanely ambitious and almost manages to pull it off.
PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000

HITMAN: CODENAME 47
PCZ #98 · 85%

○ Bringing back memories of *Leon* and *Day Of The Jackal*, *Hitman* recreates the cool excitement of carrying out a contract. Snipe from rooftops, disguise yourself in your victims' uniforms and walk away from explosions with calm elegance.
PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000

PROJECT EDEN
PCZ #107 · 85%

○ You control four variously skilled operatives in a nightmarish future metropolis that is as predictable as it is innovative. The combat and AI may be somewhat dull, but the varied puzzles and raft of cool gadgetry make up for it.
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • 020 8636 3000
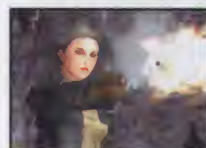
BLAIR WITCH VOL 1: RUSTIN PARR
PCZ #96 · 84%

○ As well as being a truly scary action/horror title, this is one of the finest action/adventure games we've played. The suspense is incredible, and a constant stream of jump-out-of-your-seat moments will leave you with a distinct lack of clean underwear.
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 722900

INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE
PCZ #84 · 83%

○ LucasArts moves away from the point-and-click genre and into *Tomb Raider* territory for its latest Indy game, with the adventure elements still in place. Not bad, but not for traditionalists.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND
PCZ #98 · 82%

○ One of the hardest skills to master when developing a game is the ability to make your audience genuinely laugh with you rather than at you and, undoubtedly, *Escape From Monkey Island* is one of the most genuinely funny games to come out in the last couple of years.
PUBLISHER Activision •08705 143525

METAL GEAR SOLID
PCZ #96 · 82%

○ Although it's been ported pretty much identically from the console version (with a few graphical improvements), *MGS*'s tense gameplay, well-designed levels and variety of challenging bosses makes it stand out from the majority of similar PC titles.
PUBLISHER Microsoft • 0845 7002000

RACING GAMES

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0
BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #98 · 86%

➕ With all the rally games available it was always going to be interesting to see how 2.0 would fare. Unsurprisingly, it blows away the competition. The graphics are superb, the detail all-encompassing and the car handles beautifully. If you have been waiting patiently for the definitive rally game, this is definitely it.
PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2
PCZ #96 · 84%

➕ Buckle up for some high-speed action, as you race around London and San Francisco in this sequel. You won't find a more entertaining arcade driving game. The original MM was a belter, but with more cars and races and improved controls, MM2 is now the daddy.
PUBLISHER Microsoft • 0845 7002000

F1 2001
PCZ #109 · 83%

NEW ENTRY The most versatile F1 game to date, with a full-on sim mode and an arcade setting for those who can't hack it. It looks great as well, but it comes with a huge caveat – if you want to see it as intended you're going to need a hefty machine.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450 134

LE MANS 24 HOURS
BUDGET
PCZ #87 · 81%

➕ Although not quite as challenging as the race it's based on, Le Mans 24 Hours is a driving game for skilful players who know their brakes from their elbows. You can even get involved in a rewarding career mode, culminating in the famous race itself.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060

GRAND PRIX 3
PCZ #94 · 80%

➕ This F1 title displays all the customary Crammond perfectionism. The detail is amazing, which makes it all the more puzzling as to why there is no teamwork. Don't expect much more than a 3D accelerated GP2, but if that's what you're after you'll love it.
PUBLISHER Infogrames•0161 8278060

INSANE
PCZ #97 · 78%

➕ Primarily an online racing game, Insane allows you and your friends to indulge in some off-road racing mayhem in a range of different vehicles. Its wide selection of races will have you in hysterics, but the novelty does wear off pretty quickly.
PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132

NEED FOR SPEED PORSCHE 2000
PCZ #90 · 78%

➕ Not as good as hooking up with your mates at the arcade, but still a damn good conversion of a damn fine game. Forget realism and concentrate on flinging your car around the track as fast as you can. Who needs depth when racing is this exciting?
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

RALLY MASTERS
PCZ #89 · 77%

➕ Rally games tend to blend into one another quite seamlessly. After all, the cars look exactly the same and they go round the same tracks. Rally Masters, however, offers the all-important feel of a great driving game together with loads of options and some tasty graphics.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060

TOCA 2
BUDGET
PCZ #76 · 76%

➕ Predictably, Codemasters has gone and done it again. More cars, more tracks and the same stunning attention to detail make TOCA 2 an essential purchase for petrolheads. Graphically, it may not be a massive improvement, but gameplay-wise it definitely is.
PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132

RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP
BUDGET
PCZ #84 · 75%

➕ Close, but no McRae. That was the verdict from the boy Hill on this racer. It looks fantastic and the on-screen Ordnance Survey map is a nice touch, but it's let down by some poor camera angles and unnecessarily solid obstacles. Ouch.
PUBLISHER Actualise • 01625 855015

GOD GAMES

BLACK & WHITE
BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #100 · 95%

➕ One of our joint top games of all time, Black & White is worth the hype and more. Hundreds of challenges through wondrous landscapes, packed full of spectacular AI-enhanced creatures and some genuinely original ideas. Sell your friends and family if you have to, but get a copy of this game. Pure genius.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

CALL TO POWER II
PCZ #98 · 85%

➕ Civilization II is one of the best games of all time, but that doesn't mean it doesn't need updating. It might not have the official Civ endorsement, but Call To Power II still retains the spirit of the game, while polishing almost every aspect of the gameplay.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

THE SIMS
PCZ #87 · 85%

➕ This offers a staggering amount of possibilities. Essentially, you create your own person, or family, and guide them through the ups and downs of life. It's the definitive docu-soap and makes for compelling gameplay.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

CAESAR III
PCZ #70 · 84%

➕ Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 920 9100

SIMCITY 3000
BUDGET
PCZ #74 · 83%

➕ Ten years on, SimCity remains as addictive as it ever was. Little was broken, and little was fixed. With new buildings and an enhanced transport system, SimCity 3000 is a must for old-timers and new addicts alike.
PUBLISHER Maxis/EA • 01932 450134

ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS
PCZ #97 · 83%

➕ From the creators of Pharaoh and Caesar III comes this intricate yet hugely playable micro-management god game. It is highly addictive, but suffers slightly from its lack of multiplayer options and a poor combat system.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 01189 209100

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON
PCZ #75 · 82%

➕ Pack out your own theme park with the most fiendish rides your imagination can conjure up. From rickety wooden dippers to Nemesis-style, white-knuckle gurners, RollerCoaster Tycoon is hugely addictive. Be warned.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 827 8060

DUNGEON KEEPER 2
BUDGET
PCZ #79 · 75%

➕ Dungeon Keeper was a great idea. DKII takes the essence of the original game, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and doses the myriad of features with a wise hand. And it keeps us very happy indeed.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING
BUDGET
PCZ #70 · 74%

➕ The original Populous was the game that put Bullfrog into orbit and made Peter Molyneux one of the biggest names in the industry. Even 'Peterless', the Bullfrog team proved they can do just as well without him.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

THEME HOSPITAL
BUDGET
PCZ #71 · 73%

➕ We were sceptical at first. How can a sim game involving building hospitals be fun? But it is fun, damn fun. Building bigger and better hospitals and finding a cure for all our ills, including hairyitus, bloaty head and – the bane of all human existence – Elvis impersonators.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

SPORTS

3D ACTION/STRATEGY

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: 01/02

BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #108 · 92%

NEWENTRY This update for the greatest management game ever sees the series consolidate itself as the best footy management game available. New features include masked attributes (forcing you to scout for talent), updated team and player stats and all the new rules that FIFA has imposed on us. Buy it and kiss life goodbye.
PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2
PCZ #98 · 88%
○ *Pro Skater 2* is an unbelievable experience. The sense of speed and balance is uncanny, and there is almost as much satisfaction to be had from pulling off an acrobatic new move as there is from watching your skater break all his bones as he smashes his face against the concrete.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

VIRTUAL POOL 3
PCZ #99 · 85%
○ *VP3* has the perfect physics and graphics of its predecessors plus some cool new features, including multiplayer options, career mode and training videos by pool diva Jeanette Lee. It's the best pool sim you can buy, and it's almost as good as the real thing.
PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266

FIFA 2001
PCZ #97 · 83%
○ Once again the FIFA franchise gets its yearly makeover. There are only minor improvements over the last version, but it's still the best football game for the PC. The player animations and presentation are spot on, but we can't help feeling there's a better football game to come.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

SUPREME SNOWBOARDING
PCZ #85 · 83%
○ Snowboarding is not a sport you'd expect to captivate a PC audience, but this game gives as exhilarating an experience as you could hope for without the risk of breaking a leg. Oh, and all the streetwise attitude you'd expect is there too, of course.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060

PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 2000
PCZ #92 · 82%
○ It's really not much different from last year's title, but this edition has enough subtle tweaks to make it a worthwhile purchase. It also has the best control system we've seen in what is definitely the best golf game available.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 920 9100

NBA LIVE 2000
PCZ #85 · 82%
○ As slick as always, but what makes this special is the inclusion of teams from the '50s onwards, comedy haircuts and all. It's not quite as immediate as *Inside Drive*, but is a more complete simulation of the sport all round.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

OPEN TENNIS 2000
BUDGET
PCZ #92 · 80%
○ Not since Super Tennis on the SNES have we had so much fun hitting a ball over a net. After some initial reluctance, the whole office stopped fragging and started lobbing. For a near identical game with slightly better AI, it's worth checking out *Roland Garros French Open 2001*.
PUBLISHER Cryo • 0121 250 5070

JIMMY WHITE'S CUEBALL 2
BUDGET
PCZ #68 · 78%
○ The finest snooker simulation on the PC. Chalk your cue and take on the PC or your mates and, when you're tired of the baize, you can move round and have a go on the fully featured darts board instead. Saves going down to the Working Men's Club.
PUBLISHER Virgin/Interplay • 020 7551 4266

ACTUA SOCCER 3
PCZ #72 · 72%
○ If you can't get on with *FIFA* then *Actua* is the second port of call for footy fans. It plays a faster game and there's a good range of options and a huge number of teams to play against, which goes a long way to helping maintain its shelf life.
PUBLISHER Gremlin Interactive • 0114 273 8601

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: COLD WAR CRISIS

BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #104 · 90%

○ The most anticipated military game of the year was worth all the hype and more. This squad-based shooter can be played in both third- and first-person and is the ultimate military simulation package, with a stunning atmosphere and superb mission structures. Lock yourself away because this game deserves your full attention.
PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS
BUDGET
PCZ #79 · 88%
○ You don't get a second chance in a real war, and *Hidden & Dangerous* is the game that comes closest to putting you in the middle of hell on earth. It grabs you by the balls from the first mission and doesn't let up.
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 722900

HOSTILE WATERS
PCZ #101 · 87%
○ A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or leap into a unit and get up close and personal to the action. It's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options though. Why make love when you can make war?
PUBLISHER Rage • 01512 372200
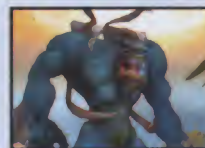
GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO
PCZ #95 · 85%
○ This mammoth and original 3D action/strategy game includes third-person shooter, RTS, RPG and real-time combat elements. It also features a superbly balanced multiplayer option and almost naked women, which usually makes for a good time.
PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266

SWAT 3: ELITE EDITION
PCZ #97 · 84%
○ AI doesn't come much better. The spectacular graphics and command system come alive here. Although not as fun as *Counter-Strike*, it's more realistic, and features five new maps and countless weapon configurations.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 920 9100

SPEC OPS 2
PCZ #84 · 82%
○ When *Spec Ops 2* came out it challenged *Hidden & Dangerous* for the top spot. The game puts you in charge of a four-man green beret squad intent on staying alive and shooting the enemy in the head. Incredibly realistic, with top-notch sound.
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 722900

WARGASM
BUDGET
PCZ #71 · 81%
○ Famed for its flight sims, DID finally delivers an action game only it could produce. With helicopters, APCs and hapless infantry running about, this is as fast-paced as a tank game could be – and it's even better to share.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 827 8000

RAINBOW SIX GOLD PACK EDITION
PCZ #81 · 81%
○ A landmark game in third-person action strategy games that was only surpassed by *Hidden & Dangerous*. Take control of your elite anti-terrorist squad, plan your missions ahead and indulge in some old fashioned killing. Also contains the *Eagle Watch* add-on pack
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 854 444

BATTLEZONE 2
PCZ #84 · 79%
○ Stunning graphics and a winning blend of strategy and first-person action in this sequel to the highly acclaimed *Battlezone*. A smooth gaming engine and a good variety of missions means the fight for world domination never looked so good.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

DELTA FORCE: LAND WARRIOR
PCZ #99 · 69%
○ It might not be a *Counter-Strike* or a *Project IGI*, however, the *Delta Force* series have a loyal following who will probably buy it anyway. Superb multiplayer action and challenging on the highest difficulty level, but unfortunately dodgy AI.
PUBLISHER Novalogic • 020 7405 1777

FLIGHT SIMS

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #99 · 89%

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually 'feel right'. Even though the graphics and general gameplay may not be ground-breaking, *Battle Of Britain* is one of the best examples of a game that transports you right into the cockpit. Tally ho!
PUBLISHER Empire Interactive • 020 8343 7337

FALCON 4   PCZ #72 · 88%

We waited patiently for years for this title to arrive, and the good news is that, for once, we weren't disappointed. *Falcon 4* features incredible 3D-accelerated graphics and a dynamic campaign structure.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060

B-17: THE MIGHTY 8TH   PCZ #96 · 87%

B17 reproduces the experience of piloting a WWII bomber. Everything's covered, from planning missions to dropping bombs. A must for WWII and realism freaks.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060

COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2   PCZ #97 · 87%

If WWII dogfighting is your thing, then this is the game you have been waiting for. Its excellent user interface, engrossing campaigns, intense combat and superb graphics create a true sense of excitement and realism.
PUBLISHER Microsoft • 0845 7002000

EUROFIGHTER TYPHOON   PCZ #103 · 85%

Finally a flight sim that values the 'flight' aspect over the 'sim' so you can just enjoy the gameplay. *Tycoon* marks the future of the genre where the campaign engine takes care of itself while you play at being Tom Cruise.
PUBLISHER Rage Software • 0151 237 2200

SPACE COMBAT

X – GOLD

BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #82 · 87%

The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic from Germany, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. The combat side of the gameplay may not be the best on offer, but with goods to trade and races to discover, it rewards patience with variety and months of play. This title is deeply hypnotic and beautiful, rather than tense and frenetic.
PUBLISHER THQ • 01483 767656
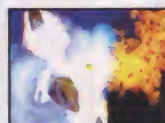
TERMINUS   PCZ #93 · 86%

Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion. It just edges out *FreeSpace 2*. Available from www.macgames.co.uk.
PUBLISHER Vicarious Visions • www.vvisions.com

FREESPACE 2   PCZ #84 · 85%

Completely different from *X*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. It boasts a superb interface, an epic story and amazing graphics, but it's a bit short-lived if you don't play online.
PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266

EDGE OF CHAOS: INDEPENDENCE WAR 2   PCZ #104 · 83%

It's likely to appeal more to die-hard space simmers, but *Edge Of Chaos* still takes steps to advancing the genre. Its graphics and absorbing free-form gaming are inspirational.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 827 8000

BUDGET

X-WING: ALLIANCE   PCZ #77 · 81%

At last. Fly the Millennium Falcon in the final episode of the long-running *X-Wing* series. Certainly the best-looking *X-Wing* game to date, *Alliance* is slow at first, but boy does it pick up later on.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

ALL-TIME CLASSICS

"Only 10? But I'm the editor, I should get eleven surely?" He might be a meglomaniac with an overblown sense of his own importance but he still gets to play games. These are his favourites.

CHUCKIE EGG (DRAGON 32/PC)

First experienced on the Dragon 32 and still being played on my PC, this is the definition of a timeless classic. Reigning supreme over the whole office with a high-score of 207,000 I was recently devastated by the news that James 'stoodent' Lyon has eclipsed me – inbetween bouts of drinking cider and black. I'll be back Lyon.

DAY OF THE TENTACLE (PC)

Some prefer *Sam & Max*, but for me LucasArts reached its adventuring peak right here, with the rise of the evil purple tentacle. Whacky, zany, and despite all that, funny as well, this is bound to bring a tear to the eye of point and clickers everywhere. It has aged perfectly, and LucasArts has released this and *Sam & Max* on one budget CD. Brilliant stuff.

DOOM (PC)

Bit of a no-brainer, but no self-respecting list would be complete without the title that changed the face of gaming. It has not aged well, and a trip down *Doom* Lane is the best way of shattering nostalgic illusions, but it introduced me to the concept of deathmatch (and several bits of my computer to the wall) and for that reason alone it's essential.

HALF-LIFE GENERATIONS (PC)

Seeing as I was only allowed to choose 10 games, I sneakily deleted *Counter-Strike* and added the word *Generations* to *Half-Life*. Two of the best birds in the world are thus killed with one stone and I get to include *Speedball 2* in my list. *Half-Life* is still the best FPS in the world, but with *Wolfenstein* just round the corner its time could be nearly up.

INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER (PSONE)

Loathe as I am to praise consoles of old, there is and has been nothing on the PC to rival the *ISS* series. The main reason is that it replicates the game of football perfectly, and if you've got an eye for the game or play in real-life you'll already have an advantage over other players, no matter how quickly they pick up the game.

GRAN TURISMO (PSONE)

While everyone was wow-ing about *GT* and the fact that it was the first game to use the utility that unlocked the full potential of the PlayStation, was i the only one pissed off because it meant I'd been wasting my money on tat for the previous couple of years? Great game though, especially with a mate who isn't as good as you are.

MR DO (ARCADE)

Being a bit of an arcade freak I had to include one of the old dogs in my collection and after careful deliberation, and a few visits to MAME I decided on the clown. *Mr Do* might look basic, but underneath is the most complex *Pac-Man-Dig-Dug*-type-game ever to feature a clown with a shooty thing. The AI is still better than most games today, too.

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS (PC)

It's testament to the quality of the game that despite the fact it was bugged to hell, it's still revered by almost everyone that touches it. Absorbing, exciting, scary and frustrating, it's the game that showed me that not everything has to be run at the speed of *Quake* to be worth a punt.

WHITE WATER (PINBALL)

Pinball might be dying a death in the real-world, but inside my head *White Water* will live forever. The first machine I scored a billion points on (discounting the new ones that give you that for touching a bumper) it's also the machine I'd install in my house today if I had the room. All together now, Whiiiiiiiittttte Waaaaaaaa-ter.

SPEEDBALL 2 (AMIGA)

There's a funny story involved in this old Amiga classic but I'd probably get arrested and sacked for reprinting it here. Instead I'll have to rely on my ever-so-slightly-shaky memory that serves this up as the game that almost got me kicked out of Uni. The Bitmaps are hard at work on a sequel, and if it's even an eighth as good as this I'll be happy to retire.

Win one of three Creative Labs Audigy Platinum soundcards worth over £500!

Complete and return our survey and you'll be entered into a free prize draw to win the latest and best soundcard from Creative Labs.

We want to make sure that PC ZONE is how you want it and to do that we need to know what you think of this magazine, plus a little bit about your gaming life. In return, we'll give you the chance to win the best gaming soundcard money can buy. We've reviewed the Player version of the Audigy card this issue on page 134 and we were so impressed we begged Creative to give us three Platinum cards to give away as part of our Reader Survey, worth £179.99 each. Perfect for games, the Platinum comes with EAX Advanced HD, which means it's capable of processing up to four complex environments simultaneously. In addition, the Dual SB 1394 connectivity means you can link with up to 63 other PCs for network games.

To be in win a chance of winning an Audigy soundcard simply complete this form (a photocopy is fine) and send it to the address given over the page before *14 December 2001*. It's a FREEPOST address so you don't even need a stamp!

WIN!

ABOUT PC ZONE

1 How do you usually get your copy of PC ZONE?
- On subscription ☐
- Retailer-every month ☐
- Retailer-most months ☐
- Retailer-occasionally ☐

2 When buying any gaming magazine what influences your decision?
- Cover feature ☐
- Cover discs ☐
- Exclusive reviews/previews/demos ☐
- Price ☐
- Extra gift ☐
- Supplement ☐
- Special edition ☐
- DVD version ☐
- Habit, I always buy the same magazine ☐

3 How would you rate the following features on the PC ZONE cover CDs?

	EXCELLENT	OK	POOR
Game demos	☐	☐	☐
Mods	☐	☐	☐
Maps	☐	☐	☐
Patches	☐	☐	☐
Extended Play	☐	☐	☐
Movies	☐	☐	☐

4 Would you be willing to pay extra for a DVD version of PC ZONE featuring five times the content of the CD version?
- Yes ☐
- No ☐
- Don't know ☐

5 How would you rate the following sections of PC ZONE?

	EXCELLENT	OK	POOR
Bulletin	☐	☐	☐
Previews	☐	☐	☐
Reviews	☐	☐	☐
Budget Games	☐	☐	☐
Reality Check	☐	☐	☐
Feedback	☐	☐	☐
Hardware	☐	☐	☐
Online Zone	☐	☐	☐
Cheatmaster	☐	☐	☐
Dear Wandy/Watchdog	☐	☐	☐
Retro/Emulation Zone	☐	☐	☐
Top 100	☐	☐	☐
CD Pages	☐	☐	☐
Extended Play	☐	☐	☐

6 Which of the following would you use to describe PC Zone? (Tick all that apply)
- Too technical ☐
- Too basic ☐
- Helpful/useful ☐
- Funny/entertaining ☐
- Irreverent/controversial ☐
- Boring ☐
- Insightful ☐
- Approachable ☐
- Unfriendly ☐
- Cutting Edge ☐
- Honest/Trustworthy ☐
- Authoritative ☐
- Arrogant ☐
- Essential ☐
- Like everything else ☐
- Easy to read ☐
- Hard to read ☐
- Easy to find my way around ☐

7 In terms of the overall layout and design of PC ZONE, would you prefer:
- More screenshots and fewer words ☐
- More words and fewer screenshots ☐
- Leave as it is thank you ☐

8 Do you a) understand, b) trust the PC ZONE scoring system?

	A)	B)
Yes	☐	☐
No	☐	☐
Don't know	☐	☐

9 Which of the following other magazines do you buy and how often?

	REG	OCC	NEVER
Computer & Video Games	☐	☐	☐
PC Format	☐	☐	☐
PC Gamer	☐	☐	☐
PC Gameplay	☐	☐	☐
Computer Shopper	☐	☐	☐
Computer Buyer	☐	☐	☐
Edge	☐	☐	☐

WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR PC

10 About how many hours a week do you spend playing games offline and online:

	PLAYING OFFLINE	PLAYING ONLINE
Less than 2 hrs	☐	☐
2-4 hrs	☐	☐
4-6 hrs	☐	☐
6-10 hrs	☐	☐
10-15 hrs	☐	☐
15-20 hrs	☐	☐
20 hrs or more	☐	☐

11 Have you ever upgraded your PC in order to make it compatible with a game you wanted?
- Yes ☐
- No ☐

12 Approximately what percentage of time spent on your PC is taken up with playing games?
- 100% ☐
- 76-99% ☐
- 51-75% ☐
- 26-50% ☐
- 25% or less ☐

13 What type of games do you play?
- Action/Adventure ☐
- Sports ☐
- Strategy/ War ☐
- Simulations ☐
- Role playing ☐
- Arcade/Puzzle ☐
- Driving ☐
- Online ☐
- Retro ☐

14 How do you rate the importance in PC games of a) sound and b) graphics? Please rate on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important.
- Sound ☐
- Graphics ☐

ONLINE

15 Do you use your PC online?
- Yes ☐
- No ☐
- If No, go straight to Q20

16 How do you currently connect to the Internet?
- ADSL ☐
- Modem (56k or less) ☐
- ISDN ☐
- Cable Modem ☐
- Satellite ☐

17 Are you planning to upgrade to a high-speed account (ADSL or cable)?
- Yes ☐
- No ☐
- Don't know ☐

18 How do you rate the new PC ZONE website?
- Better ☐
- Worse ☐
- Same ☐
- Hadn't noticed a change ☐
- Haven't visited it ☐

19 If you have accessed the new PC ZONE website, how would you rate the following sections of it?

	EXCELLENT	OK	POOR
News	☐	☐	☐
Previews	☐	☐	☐
Reviews	☐	☐	☐
Features	☐	☐	☐
Data	☐	☐	☐
Interact	☐	☐	☐
Download	☐	☐	☐
Tips	☐	☐	☐
Play	☐	☐	☐

WHAT YOU BUY

20 Roughly, how often have you tended to upgrade your PC since you first bought it?
- Every 6 months ☐
- Every 6-12 months ☐
- Every 1-2 years ☐
- Every 2-3 years ☐
- Less often ☐
- Haven't upgraded yet ☐

21 Are you intending to replace or upgrade your computer in the next 12 months?

	REPLACE	UPGRADE
Yes	☐	☐
No	☐	☐
Not sure	☐	☐

22 Do you currently own or intend to buy any of the following for your PC?

	OWN	INTEND TO BUY
DVD Drive	☐	☐
Modem	☐	☐
Sound card	☐	☐
Hard drive	☐	☐
Graphics card	☐	☐
Speakers	☐	☐
17" or bigger monitor	☐	☐
Extra RAM	☐	☐
CD writer	☐	☐
AMD processor	☐	☐
Intel processor	☐	☐
Joystick	☐	☐
Steering Wheel	☐	☐
Gamepad	☐	☐

23 Do you currently own or intend to buy any of the following other products?

	OWN	INTEND TO BUY
Digital camera	☐	☐
Scanner	☐	☐
Printer	☐	☐
PlayStation 2	☐	☐
Xbox	☐	☐
Game Cube	☐	☐

24 How much do you intend to spend on hardware for your PC and/or for a new PC over the next year?
- Nothing ☐
- Up to £299 ☐
- £300-£599 ☐
- £600-£999 ☐
- £1,000-£1,499 ☐
- £1,500-£1,999 ☐
- £2,000 or more ☐

25 On average, how much do you spend on PC games in 3 months?
- Up to £49 ☐
- £50-£99 ☐
- £100-£199 ☐
- £200-£399 ☐
- £400 or over ☐

26 Which of the following influence your decision to buy a game?
- Review in PC ZONE ☐
- Subject matter/genre ☐
- Word of mouth/comments on-line ☐
- Review in other mags ☐
- Review on the Internet ☐
- Advertising ☐
- Review on TV/radio ☐
- Packaging ☐
- Playable games demo ☐
- Rolling games demo ☐

27 Have you ever purchased a product or service as a result of seeing it reviewed or advertised in PC Zone?

	REVIEW	ADVERT
Yes	☐	☐
No	☐	☐

28 About how long before a game is available in shops do you usually know about it?
- 1 week ☐
- 1 month ☐
- 3 months ☐
- 6 months ☐
- 1 year ☐
- 2 years or more ☐
- I don't know about it before I see it in shops ☐

29 When a game's release date is postponed, does it confuse you as to when you'll be able to buy the game?
- Yes ☐
- No ☐
- Don't know/don't care ☐

30 A game you are interested in buying has received a mediocre review score, but you see a good advert for it. Do you…
- Definitely buy it ☐
- Consider buying it ☐
- Definitely not buy it ☐
- Don't know/ not stated ☐

31 When a big game is launched, about how soon do you normally buy it?
- 1st week ☐
- 1st fortnight ☐
- 1st month ☐
- 1st 3 months ☐
- When it comes down in price ☐

ABOUT YOU

32 Are you…?
- Male ☐
- Female ☐

33 How old are you?
- 701 Under 15 ☐
- 702 15-17 ☐
- 703 18-24 ☐
- 704 25-34 ☐
- 705 35-44 ☐
- 706 45-54 ☐
- 707 55-64 ☐
- 708 65 or over ☐

Please write here what your actual age is……………

34 Do you live…
- With your parents ☐
- With partner/family ☐
- With friends ☐
- Alone ☐

35 Which of the following best describes your occupation?
- 601 Senior Managerial/ senior professional ☐
- 602 Managerial/professional ☐
- 603 Executive ☐
- 604 Clerical ☐
- 605 Work from home /self-employed ☐
- 606 Manual ☐
- 607 Unemployed ☐
- 608 Retired ☐
- 609 In full-time education ☐
- 610 Other ☐

36 About how much do you earn a year?
- 801 Under £10,000 ☐
- 802 £10,000-£14,999 ☐
- 803 £15,000-£19,999 ☐
- 804 £20,000-£24,999 ☐
- 805 £25,000-£29,999 ☐
- 806 £30,000-£39,999 ☐
- 807 £40,000 or over ☐

THANKS FOR YOUR HELP

Thank you for your participation and time. In order to be entered into the FREE prize draw please fill in your details below, and return your survey to our freepost address by 14th December 2001.

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☐ Please tick this box if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers from companies other than Dennis Publishing OR if you are under 18 years of age.

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Q 0112

EXTENDEDPLAY

This month, we bring you action, strategy and sheer adrenaline-filled panic with add-ons for ace war shoot 'em up *Operation Flashpoint* and top-class battle sim *Ground Control*. Don't say we're not good to you

⊗ **BATTLE SCARRED** Tony Lamb

TRY IT YOURSELF

Installation of all these maps and missions is pretty straightforward, but remember to always check out .zip files for any special instructions.

For *Operation Flashpoint*, the single-player (SP) mission files should unzip into your codemasters\operationflashpoint\ missions folder and multiplayer mission files into the \MPmissions directory. You can then select them from the menu as you would any original instalment. As a bonus, many have a full briefing for you to enjoy too.

For *Ground Control*, unzip files into your Sierra\Gc\data\maps directory, or in the case of the Massive Software map packs, run the .exe files and the maps will self-extract.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT

Combining the awesome outdoor environments of *Delta Force* with the realism of war, *Operation Flashpoint* adds a host of new features to the genre to become the best tactical shoot 'em up around. It's a war sim with realistic weapons, a variety of usable vehicles from tanks to helicopters, and a strategy and command system second to none. We awarded this game *PC ZONE* classic status and it's well deserved.

⊗ Attack on Montignac (hard) – SP MISSION
Author (T)R@cer
Filename attack_on_montignac.zip
Size 24Kb
Rating ⊙⊙⊙⊙○

⬆ Take advantage of the LAW rockets – just make sure you choose your targets carefully.

⬆ **You can choose your weapons for this defensive mission.**

Protect the vulnerable civilians of Montignac from a multi-faceted Russian attack. You'll face tanks, BMPs, assault troops brought in by helicopter and an infantry attack too. Squaring up to the enemy outside the town is suicidal – your only chance is to let them close in and then tackle them. All civilians have to survive. If you're good, you might just succeed.

⊗ The Beach Landing SINGLE-PLAYER MISSION
Author Dave Deacon
Filename thebeach2.zip
Size 41Kb
Rating ⊙⊙⊙⊙○

⬆ **Use the boat to move about, but get off quickly if you come under fire.**

US forces have a new version of the A-10 tankbuster jet and are planning to use it in a decisive airstrike. Russian forces will try to mount a concerted air and seaborne attack to destroy it. You mustn't let this happen. The Russian forces will land quickly, so get to the beach swiftly to repel the attack.

⊗ Listening Post SINGLE-PLAYER MISSION
Author Little Dave
Filename listening_post.zip
Size 25Kb
Rating ⊙⊙⊙⊙○

Lead a parachute attack on a listening post that would give

Russian forces early warning of a major offensive against Everon Island. You have to kill the enemy intelligence officer and destroy a converted SU25 spy plane too.

⬆ **Your helicopter gunner will soften up the opposition for you.**

The mission's critical task is the destruction of the listening post, so once that's done you can get the hell out of there!

⊗ Moving to St. Pierre SINGLE-PLAYER MISSION
Author Juho Isola
Filename S(1).zip
Size 15Kb
Rating ⊙⊙⊙○○

⬆ **Stuck in a truck with an AK47 firing at you? That's not a good place to be.**

⬆ **Take no prisoners!**

Assist in the recapture of the town of St Pierre from occupying Russian forces. You command one team, and two more are in reserve, awaiting your call. However, before you can attack St Pierre, you have to investigate the town of Vernon, which lies on the same road. Use a heavy truck to get around, but watch out for enemy armour. Beware enemy reinforcements from the south.

⊗ Beach Head – SP MISSION
Author Tyrell
Filename beach_head.zip
Size 23Kb
Rating ⊙⊙⊙○○

⬆ **A night-time mission and 100 per cent concentration required.**

Leading an airborne attack on Everon Island, you go in first with Blue team to secure the landing zone before calling in the rest of your battalion. The Russian base you have to target is small, but heavily defended. You'll also find that the attack is at night, so take extra care.

⊗ The Death Birds SINGLE-PLAYER MISSION
Author Tyrell
Filename deathbirds.zip
Size 20Kb
Rating ⊙⊙⊙○○

As a Russian commando you have to undertake a solitary night infiltration mission onto Malden Island. You need to destroy three American A10 tankbuster aircraft as they are severely hindering Russian activities on Everon.

⬆ **Find the gaps in the wire to get into the base. Watch out for roaming guards.**

Get in undetected, avoid the patrols, destroy the planes, and see if you can get out alive. It can be done, but it's not easy.

⊗ Broken Peace SINGLE-PLAYER MISSION
Author Tyrell
Filename broken_peace.zip
Size 37Kb
Rating ⊙⊙⊙○○

⬆ **If the patrol spots you the mission is a failure, whether you survive or not.**

As a Russian soldier, your task is to get into the town of Le Moule to assassinate two officers – one American, one Resistance – to prevent the two sides from

NET ADDRESSES

www.pczone.co.uk
The Nethead's favourite gaming site, brought to you by us. Top news, top tips, top action.

---
www.axleonline.com
An outstanding resource for the discerning *Flash* fan. Over 100 single-player missions, multiplayer missions, co-ops, deathmatch maps and much, much more.

---
www.flashpointdatabase.com
A top site for *Flash* stuff. Check it out for news, missions, reviews, links, demos, patches, music and lots more. Outstanding.

---
www.flashpointcenter.com
A superb site for keeping up to date with the very latest *Flash* news and discussions.

---
www.flashpointarena.com
Lots of *Flash* stuff here. News, missions, fan art, tutorials, tools and lots more.

---
www.opf-missions.net
Loads of single-player missions, screens, music tracks, unit details and lots of other cool *Flash* stuff.

---
www.3dactionplanet.com/flashpoint
A good site, and stuffed to the gills with *Flash* goodies. Missions, music, screens, news and more.

---

signing a treaty. How you kill them is unimportant – you can either snipe them or blow them up – but your superiors want them dead. You set off from the forests with dawn upon you. Remember that as the sun rises, you become more visible, and your Dragunov sniper rifle is not a great defensive weapon. Be stealthy – if you are detected the meeting will be cancelled, and you'll wind up dead.

❂ How Not To Be Seen
MOVIE
Author Reikoku
Filename hntbs.zip
Size 529Kb
Rating ❂❂❂⊙⊙

⬆ Another innocent appears to have forgotten the cardinal rule of How Not to be Seen.

This isn't a mission – you can't do anything – but a remake of a famous Monty Python sketch done using the OF engine, and the

original John Cleese soundtrack. Sadly, we can't put it on the CD, but if you see it at one of the websites, it's worth the 30-second download.

❂ Incursion
SINGLE-PLAYER MISSION
Author Tyrell
Filename incursion.zip
Size 152Kb
Rating ❂❂❂⊙⊙

⬆ Beware... APCs on steep slopes make fat, juicy slow-moving targets.

Accompany a medical team to the town of Arudy, following a brutal attack by Russian troops. Your own town has also been attacked, so your forces are not at full strength, and this is not helped by another Russian attack hitting you while you try to get your team together. Beware that the terrain is very hilly, so your APC will struggle unless you follow the road (which could be mined). The Russians

attacked Arudy for a reason – they may not want to give it up easily.

❂ Enemy Terrain
SP/MP MISSION
Author Belial
Filename enemyterrain.zip
Size 82Kb
Rating ❂❂❂⊙⊙

⬆ This lot don't look friendly.

In this mission you lead a team of five NATO soldiers into enemy territory to capture and bring back one of a new breed of Russian aircraft with an all-new weapons guidance system. You're supposed to take a UH60, which will drop you near the Russian airbase, but even before takeoff you'll quickly find a nasty surprise awaits you – an incoming Soviet attack, which is easily defeated but reduces your helo to scrap. You'll need to find another way to get to your target.

❂ Island_Invasion
SP/MP MISSION
Author Belial
Filename island_invasion.zip
Size 35Kb
Rating ❂❂❂❂⊙

⬆ Use the boat to move about, but get off quickly if you come under fire.

Your mission is to lead your team to an island East of Malden and take out a Russian garrison. The first base is big, but only lightly defended, so the attack is easy. The second base, however, is a much harder proposition – it's well defended, has patrols out, and you'll likely come under fire on the way in. Take it carefully and you should succeed in killing all the enemy soldiers and destroying the Scud launcher too.

❂ The Informant
SP/MP MISSION
Author Belial
Filename the_informant.zip
Size 22Kb
Rating ❂❂⊙⊙⊙
Take command of a five-man squad tasked with bringing a

much-needed informant through enemy lines to your NATO base. Unfortunately, it's a long journey, and the area is swarming with Russian soldiers.

⬆ If he's so important, you'd think he'd have a bulletproof vest.

Your best bet is to steal a Russian helicopter or commandeer a tank, and while that isn't too difficult, they are both a long walk away – too far unless you have plenty of time to complete the map. You also have to guard the informant with your life – if he dies, you lose. Best as multiplayer.

❂ Search & Rescue
SINGLE-PLAYER MISSION
Author Shadow
Filename spsar1.zip
Size 86Kb
Rating ❂❂❂⊙⊙
An Apache helicopter has gone down and you now have to find the crew and get them home alive. Parachute in from a Cessna and find the helo. Beware of guards and an enemy helicopter.

The Russians have thoughtfully left a jeep nearby – steal it and head for the NATO base as fast as you can. Beware of Russian roadblocks as they're likely to open fire on you.

❂ Operation Counting Out
SINGLE-PLAYER MISSION
Author Richard Cannon
Filename counting.zip
Size 19Kb
Rating ❂❂❂⊙⊙
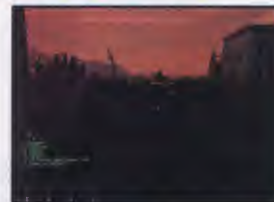
⬆ In this light, any shadow could be an enemy soldier.

Your task is to go in with four other men and clear the Russians out of Kolgujev. Intelligence says the Soviets have a small camp in the middle of the town and after insertion via chopper, that's where you're heading. It's a dusk mission, but NVGs aren't much use yet. Watch out for friendly fire as the half-light makes things difficult. You'll soon find out that these Reds are no pushover either.

SEARCH & RESCUE

When the Russian HIND turns up, it's time to run like hell.

BLOOD SPORT

The Reds sure made a mess of this place...

WIDOWS RIDGE
SP MISSION

MAP OF THE MONTH
OPERATION FLASHPOINT

Author Ian Murrin
Filename compwidows.zip
Size 69Kb
Rating ❂❂❂❂❂

⬆ Typical squaddies – give them a five-minute break and on goes the kettle.

A great single-player mission which sees you tasked with leading a squad behind enemy lines to re-establish contact with a missing reconnaissance party. Once you locate the Bravo Recon team and get news of what happened, watch out for enemy attack and be ready to call in air and artillery support. A nearby hill could still be a hotbed of enemy activity and you have to finish the recon team's mission by checking it out and reporting back to base.

Bravo Recon has been hit...

GROUND CONTROL

Sacrificing in-depth asset management and resource gathering for having a damn good time proved to be a recipe for success for Massive Entertainment's *Ground Control*, which became a heady relief from over-complex strategy games. Command Crayven or New Dawn forces in a variety of battles in stunning 3D landscapes with lots of firepower and great units.

✪ DC_Assault
SINGLE-PLAYER MAP
Author Ninja Prime
Filename DC_Assault
Size 474Kb
Rating ✪✪✪○○

⬆ Tricky terrain makes Assault a hard map.

Take command of Phoenix forces in a skirmish mission to stamp out Crayven Corp and New Dawn bases in your area. Unfortunately for you, you don't know where the bases are, so take care and don't let your troops get too thinly spread out.

OUTPOST SP MAP

Author Ninja Prime
Filename outpost.zip
Size 542Kb
Rating ✪✪✪✪

In command of New Dawn forces, your mission is to defend your base from concerted Crayven Corp attacks. Be on your guard – they'll hit you hard and fast.

⬆ Find enemy bases and destroy them to prevent attacks.

Concentrated fire from above is very effective against ground units.

✪ Homebase
SINGLE-PLAYER MAP
Author Ninja Prime
Filename homebase.zip
Size 457Kb
Rating ✪✪✪○○

⬆ This simple layout proves tricky.

The Order of the New Dawn have put you in charge of a mission to destroy Crayven Corp and Phoenix bases. Your objective is their total destruction – but you've got to find them first.

✪ Massive GC Map Pack 02
Author Massive Entertainment
Filename gc_mappack02.exe
Size 1.6Mb
Rating ✪✪✪✪○

⬆ Destroy enemy trucks to stop opposing teams from winning.

Top stuff from Massive with three maps included in this bonus add-on pack…

✪ SK2_Field of Destruction is a skirmish map where you start in the middle of the map and face attacks from all sides. Survive to the time limit to win.
✪ SZ7_Heavy Metal2 is a four-player map with a scoring zone in the middle. Whoever holds that scoring area gets the points.
✪ TN1_DuskConvoy (Truckers Nightmare) sees two teams struggling to get a convoy of trucks safely into their base while simultaneously trying to destroy an enemy convoy. Whoever manages to get the most trucks into their base wins.

✪ Massive GC Map Pack 03
Author Massive Entertainment
Filename gc_mappack03.exe
Size 2Mb
Rating ✪✪✪✪○

⬆ If you're an attacker, here's your target. Camouflage isn't a strong point obviously…

⬆ Use your scouts to track down trucks. They can also spot approaching enemies.

More Massive fun with another three maps to keep you busy…
✪ AS3_Charge is an assault mission where the objective is to get any of your units onto a plateau on the other side of the map. Needless to say, you'll be running the gauntlet.
✪ ES1_Riverbed is an escape map. Your task is to get from one corner of the map diagonally across to the other without getting your forces wiped out.
✪ TN2_Dusty Rush plays just like Truckers Nightmare in Map Pack 2. Two trucks have to get across the map with one player defending them and the other player attacking.

✪ Massive GC Map Pack 04
Author Massive Entertainment
Filename gc_mappack04.exe
Size 1.4Mb
Rating ✪✪✪✪○

⬆ Get units to an enemy beacon to destroy it.

⬆ Defend the approaches to your base at all costs.

The fourth selection of add-on maps from developers Massive…
✪ AS4_Salamander is a four-player battle. The objective is to destroy each opposing team's beacon so they can't call for help, and then wipe them out.
✪ DM8_Coliseum is a Last Man Standing deathmatch for eight players set in a round, metallic arena. Survive the rest to win.

✪ ES2_Mountains is an escape map for two players. Escapees try and get away through the canyons, while hunters have to stop them.

✪ Massive GC Map Pack 05
Author Massive Entertainment
Filename gc_mappack05.exe
Size 1.6Mb
Rating ✪✪✪✪○

⬆ Get your forces ready for a heavy attack.

Massive's last freebie map pack and three more fun-filled maps…
✪ SO1_TheAtoll is a two-team 'best of three' fight over three different map areas. Whoever wins two battles, wins overall.
✪ ES3_NoneShallPass isn't a Monty Python Sketch, but it could be if you mess it up. Two teams have to escape from their dropzone while preventing their opponent from doing the same.
✪ SK3_HillOfDeath is a skirmish mission where you start in the middle of the map and just have to survive until the timer runs out.

MASSIVE GC MAP PACK 05
Hit your enemy hard and you might just win.

NET ADDRESSES

www.sierrastudios.com/games/groundcontrol
It's the official game site and it's full of information about the storyline, game features and just about everything to do with *GC*. Here you'll find the latest news, screens, movies, music and more details of the warring factions in *Ground Control* – the Crayven Corporation and the Order of the New Dawn.

www.massive.se
The home of Massive Entertainment themselves. 'Nuff said.

www.gccenter.com
A great site with loads of maps, screenshots, news and more.

www.maps.groundcontrolhq.com
A smaller *GC* fansite but still a good selection of maps.

www.groun^dcontrol.won.net
Lots of *GC*-related news, screenshots, clan information and more.

COMMENT

We regularly bemoan poor plot and weak narratives, but the level of difficulty in games is another can of worms

⭐ **HARD MAN** Richie Shoemaker

All too often we judge a game's storyline against those of film, but against what other medium can we judge a game's difficulty? Since computer games are the only interactive medium, there is no benchmark save for other games within a genre that we can take this measurement from. This is no bad thing of course, games have and continue to pioneer in many ways, but there have been calls within the industry that games, PC games especially, are too hard. Microsoft is one publisher who has been vocal about this, claiming in not so many words that developers need to dumb down their efforts to appeal to an apparent mass

the recent *Dune* sequel, not only does each game's difficulty rise at a steady and predictable rate, as time has gone on and as we've all become overly familiar with real-time strategy mechanics, the gameplay has become ever more tedious. I played *Battle For Dune* the other day and just couldn't bear it after 20 minutes, simply because back in 1993 I was going through the exact same motions playing *Dune 2*. The novelty wears thin after eight years.

For me *Sudden Strike* is a fantastic example of mission design when it comes to difficulty, even if together the levels lacked cohesion. In no particular order, some missions were easy, others seemingly impossible. As I

Commandos 2 – hard as nails, all the way.

> **There is nothing more disheartening than knowing that your enemies will be just that little bit harder than the last level**

market, a market we are led to believe that prefers the likes of *Deer Hunter* to *Operation Flashpoint*. Certainly this may have been the case a couple of years ago, but with the aforementioned *Flashpoint* riding high in the world charts and *Commandos 2* already knocking it off its Cold War perch, it seems obvious that many PC gamers do in fact like a challenge.

GAME INVADERS

My personal gripe on the subject isn't that games are generally too easy or too difficult, but that they usually start easy and gradually become less so. This may seem an obvious way to go if you are developing a game, but in most cases such an approach to a game's increasing level of difficulty bears close correlation to how entertaining a game is. Take your typical Westwood game: from *Command & Conquer* to

remember saying in the review, whether by design or accident on the part of the developers, the fluctuating difficulty kept me on my tactical toes – only through replaying a mission did I come to know what to expect. Which is how it should be. Whether in a strategy or action game, there is nothing more disheartening than knowing that your enemies will be just that bit harder than the last level. For God's sake, we've moved on since *Space Invaders*, haven't we?

END GAME

Commandos 2 is another great example of how to get difficulty right. In this case rock hard from beginning to end. Again there's nothing wrong with that. Requiring a considered approach, almost akin to point-and-click adventure, the *Commandos'* method of drip-feeding new characters, enemies and

equipment, coupled with the need to retread steps across massive levels means players are constantly learning new tricks with missions springing numerous surprises. Whether we'll be just as entertained in *Commandos 4* is another matter, but unlike Westwood, its creators Pyro at least know to stop while they're ahead having stated that a second sequel won't be emerging from their door.

But I digress. I don't mean for this Comment to become an anti-Westwood tirade. My point is only that developers need to think more about how to approach difficulty in games. Difficulty isn't about increasing enemy numbers; it's about giving the player more responsibility, more to do in the same amount of time. Moreover it's about learning new things. I know for example how to build bases and send hundreds of troops to their death in a strategy game. I know too how to shoot a gun in an FPS. Consequently both *Battle For Dune* and last month's *Red Faction* didn't do much for me, while *Flashpoint* and

Commandos 2 did. Both of the latter offer something new, even for die-hard veterans of computer-based conflict. In both games the difficulty fluctuates to a greater or lesser extent from mission to mission, rather than rising steadily from easy to tedium.

Of course there is room for mass-market games, as much as there is for mass-market manufactured pop stars. Perhaps here I am already preaching to the converted, but as a PC gamer I consider myself hardcore and I suspect many of you reading this are too. Like you, I want to be

entertained, enthralled, surprised, addicted and occasionally frustrated. Graphics might tempt me into the game, storyline and interface might keep me going, but if you want me to finish your game, for bloody hell's sake get the balance right. No easy task I know, but rather than add some extra monsters and cut down a player's resources, developers need to treat the issue of difficulty as they would a game's storyline, its graphical style and interface – as part of the whole rather than an afterthought. 🎮

It may look like Emperor: Battle For Dune, but it plays like Dune 2.